The Radio Boys as Soldiers of Fortune

Gerald Breckenridge

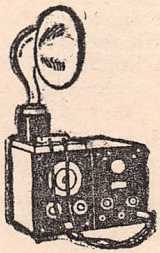
"They think you work magic within the tower."
(Page 82) *(The Radio Boys as Soldiers of Fortune.)*

THE RADIO BOYS
AS SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE

By GERALD BRECKENRIDGE

AUTHOR OF

"The Radio Boys on the Mexican Border," "The Radio Boys on Secret Service Duty," "The Radio Boys with Revenue Guards," "The Radio Boys Search for The Incas Treasure," "The Radio Boys Rescue the Lost Alaska Expedition," "The Radio Boys Seek the Lost Atlantis," "The Radio Boys In Darkest Africa," "The Radio Boys with the Border Patrol."



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The Radio Boys Series

A SERIES OF STORIES FOR BOYS OF ALL AGES

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CHAPTER I

IN WHICH THE INVENTOR PLANS TO BEARD THE DICTATOR

"ONE of us must make another try to gain Don Pedro's consent," said Jack Hampton. "We can't go ahead until we do."

Rising from his seat at a table covered with strange apparatus, he thrust the chair aside impatiently, and began striding up and down the room.

His companion sat with worried unseeing eyes bent upon the floor, while thin nervous fingers drummed the table. Jack had been sitting opposite.

"Look here," said Jack, circling the table and dropping a hand on the other's shoulders; "why don't you take a fling at it? I've been the negotiator so far, but it seems to me the Dictator is beginning to weary of me a bit. Twice lately when I have sought

his permission to go through the lines to our San Andres station, he has put me off. Perhaps you will have better luck. Come, Professor, what do you say?"

A visible shudder shook the slight frame of the older man thus addressed. Professor Bonatelli was not made of the stern material of his young companion and chief. Assigned by the great Radio Trust of America to assist the distinguished young inventor in his secret experiments in developing "Radio Vision" to the point of commercial use, he was a good assistant but not an executive.

He glanced up with a scared look on his thin lined face.

"Oh, but, Jack, I couldn't," he said. "I—I couldn't. Why, to be perfectly honest with you, that man scares me out of my wits. He has the great voice—the huge frame; and to me he looks like some monstrous bloated spider waiting in his web for the prey to be snared."

With a short laugh, Jack resumed his pacing of the laboratory. Professor Bonatelli's glance followed him, filled with admiration. This tall handsome youth, scarce out of his 'teens, in only his second year after graduation from Yale had made a name for himself as one of the foremost radio engineers of the age. And now after months of secret experimentation in this secluded Latin-American republic

of Valopia, he was about to give to the world a new invention before which his others would pale into insignificance. Yet with it all, he was so modest and unassuming that in Professor Bonatelli's attitude toward him there was not the slightest trace of envy. For Jack, the older man felt only admiration and warm affection.

Indeed, there was something of slave-like devotion toward his young chief in the attitude of the older man. He would have liked nothing better than to be able to lift from Jack's shoulders the burden of having to do with the matter under discussion. To go to the Dictator of Valopia; to say to him, "Here, we are not afraid of the rebels, and we demand permission to go to our San Andres station back in the mountains because our work will be at a standstill until we do!"—ah, if he could only do that! But, sighing, he realized how impossible it would be. No, Jack alone was capable of bearding Don Pedro.

While Professor Bonatelli's thoughts were thus busy, Jack halted in his progress about the room. It was outfitted as a laboratory, but a vastly different laboratory from the kind which that word ordinarily brings to mind. A bewildering variety of odds and ends of radio equipment were scattered over the two great tables and on shelves along the walls in such seeming disarray that, probably, the

two men who worked there alone could make head or tail of it all. It was before one of the largest devices in the laboratory that Jack paused.

The machine bore a family resemblance to the huge cameras of photographers who specialize on the taking of portraits. Its outward appearance was that of a box some three feet in length, two in breadth and eighteen inches high. In one end was a projection lense, resembling that of the motion picture projection machine. Along the side were numerous levers and wheels. Wires entered from the bottom. This mysterious box, painted black, stood on a stout superstructure of crisscrossing beams, so arranged that they could be folded down or lengthened by means of an adjustment screw, in order to raise or lower the box.

While Jack stood in frowning contemplation of this device, and Professor Bonatelli sat with his head clasped between his hands and his elbows propped on the table, the door in the far end of the laboratory opened, and a merry voice called: "Dinner in five minutes."

At the sound, Professor Bonatelli looked up with a smile, and Jack, whirling, held out his hands toward the advancing figure of his young wife, Rafaela. An acquaintance begun under strange circumstances during Jack's schoolboy days, when Rafaela had aided Jack to rescue his father from

imprisonment in Mexico, had ripened during the years. The fact that Mr. Hampton's captor, the peppery Mexican patriot, Don Ferdinand y Calomares, was Rafaela's father, had not operated to keep them apart. Indeed, Don Ferdinand's object having been not robbery, but the desire to cause the United States to intervene in the affairs of his own unhappy country, the two older men also had been drawn together. Thus was established a firm friendship which grew deeper when, at a later period, Jack was enabled to save Rafaela from the clutches of a Mexican bandit. Before leaving New York to bury himself in Valopia, where he might conduct his experiments in "Radio Vision" safe from the spying eyes of foreign radio interests, Jack had married Rafaela. A feature of the wedding had been the fact that there were two "best men" instead of the customary one, for Bob Temple and Frank Merrick, Jack's lifelong companions, had insisted on filling the position together.

Rafaela stood at the entrance a moment, the doorway framing her dark Spanish beauty, set off by the Valopian costume which she had adopted as her own. Then with a laugh she advanced and, seizing Jack's outstretched hands, danced around him in a flutter of swirling skirts and mantilla.

"Come, come, Senor Serious," she cried, "why so glum? Smile for the lady. Smile, I say." And

dropping his hands, she placed her own on her hips and stamped a tiny foot.

"Easy enough to say, 'Smile,' " answered Jack. "But we have our own problem to worry us, Professor Bonatelli and I. When this—" placing a hand on the camera-like apparatus which he had been contemplating— "is separated from its helpmate, up at our San Andres station, work is at a standstill."

"So," said Rafaela. "I see. This Don Pedro—"

"Yes," Jack answered, nodding, "this Don Pedro won't let us go to San Andres because he says we might fall into the hands of the rebels, and then he'd be answerable to the United States government."

"But you do not fear the rebels?"

"No," said Jack, "I don't. So far as I can tell they're the best people of Valopia. They have taken up arms to free themselves from a bully and his paid riff-raff. We'd all be safer in their hands than in Don Pedro's. But, of course," he added, with a smile. "I can't use that as an argument with him. However, let's forget it for the time being and think of something more important. I'm hungry, and it seems to me I heard a young lady announce dinner."

Rafaela started violently, and whirled toward the door. "Oh, I forgot, I must consult with Juan before dinner, too." And she was gone, calling over her shoulder an injunction for Jack and Professor

Bonatelli to hasten with their ablutions and appear in the patio.

Dinner was served in the patio, while twilight deepened into velvety night. It was a delightful place and hour, and the occasion of the evening meal always brought Jack a sense of peace and satisfaction, no matter what the day's tribulations and worries had been. Somewhere near at hand could be heard the tinkle of a fountain splashing in a pool; the upper fronds of the palm trees rustled faintly in a passing breeze; the golden stars of the tropics swam overhead, and in the midst of all stood the candle lighted table with the lovely face of Rafaela opposite. Tonight, however, all this failed to bring Jack his usual relief from the worries of the day; and Rafaela saw and understood.

She decided that Jack needed a confidante other than the mouse-like and insufficient Professor Bonatelli, to whom he might unburden his troubles. So, instead of bringing up the subject of the Brazilian Opera Company, which was to open in repertoire with "Mamon" at the Valopian Opera House the next night, when dessert had been eaten and coffee served, she launched into a discussion of Jack's problem. A few judicious questions sufficed, and Jack was soon rattling away at a great rate, while his earlier moodiness disappeared. For a time, Professor Bonatelli sat back and listened, then ex-

cusing himself, he departed for the Plaza and the evening concert, leaving them alone.

"But Jack," interposed Rafaela, presently, "I do not quite understand. Why is it that you must go to San Andres?"

"Well, you see, when we first began work, the country was quiet. We wanted two stations—one for our sending apparatus and one for the receiving. So we chose San Andres, which, as you know, is a little village some fifty miles distant in the mountains, for our sending station. Everything went well until this past week, when Don Pedro refused to let Professor Bonatelli return to San Andres, after he had come in for a consultation with me. The Dictator says he fears that the rebels will seize the Professor, or me, if it is I who go, and thus make trouble for him."

"Trouble? By causing the United States to demand your release of Don Pedro?"

"Yes," said Jack. "Foolish, isn't it? The rebels, as far as I can get at the truth, are the best people in Valopia."

Rafaela smiled. "True, Jack. But father was one of the foremost men in Mexico, yet he was in revolt against the Mexican government at one time. And he seized your father in order to make trouble for Obregon with the United States."

Jack struck his head. "Solid ivory, Rafaela. I

hadn't thought of that. Yes, it might be that the rebels would seize Professor Bonatelli or me, if we went to San Andres. I can see now that Don Pedro is right from his point of view. Nevertheless—"

He lapsed into thought, and for a time there was a silence, which Rafaela finally broke.

"Of what are you thinking?"

"Why, that we must get our apparatus from San Andres, no matter what trouble our going there would mean for the Dictator. The rebels aren't in strength, so far, anyhow. And we have paid Don Pedro such huge sums for the concession, for the privilege of conducting our experiments in his country that he owes us protection."

Jack spoke indignantly. The money which the Radio Trust had been compelled to pay Don Pedro was a sore point with him. To his straightforward American way of doing business, it had been nothing less than extortion. His eyes snapped in the candle-light.

"I'll demand an escort to San Andres," he said.

"Then you will call on Don Pedro again?"

"To-morrow."

"But he is at his summer place at El Miraflores in the mountains."

"I'll ride up there in the morning. It takes only a few hours."

"Very well," assented Rafaela, who saw that

Jack's mind was made up, and that there was little to be gained by opposition. Pushing back her chair, she arose. Jack jumped up, too.

"Listen," said she, "they are playing 'La Cruz de Mayo' in the Plaza."

The strains of the Valopian symphony orchestra floated into the patio.

"Come." Rafaela took Jack's arm. "Let us go to the balcony overlooking the Plaza where we can hear the music and watch the crowds."

"Good," laughed Jack. "All the Valopian dandies will be out tonight. It is such a balmy evening. I'll get my nightly lesson in fashions and manners."

And laughing in chorus, they entered the old mansion which Jack had rented from one of the impoverished Valopian grandees, and made their way to the iron-grilled balcony on the second floor, where the great Plaza in which the night life of the city revolved could be seen spread out below.

CHAPTER II.

DON PEDRO BRINGS AN UNEXPECTED CHARGE

THERE might be a storm cloud hanging over Valopia—a cloud of revolution prepared to loose its thunders and lightnings on the smiling gem-like land of mountains, plains and far-stretching coast. If so, however, it was not apparent as Jack mounted on Victor, a handsome deep-bottomed chestnut which he had been lucky enough to purchase for far less than such an animal would have brought in America, clattered out of the court-yard the next morning.

Early though the hour, the great Plaza already was astir with life and movement. A vastly different scene it presented from the previous night, thought Jack, as after waving farewell to Rafaela, who stood above him on the balcony, he put Victor's head for the Calle Escombar. Then, the band had been playing in the kiosk amid the trees of the little central park, while Valopian society had moved around and around the Plaza in endless circling; now, the daily market was in full swing. Booths lined the walls —the walls of his own house, of other houses. Only

the steps of the great cathedral adjoining his own residence, and of the Presidential Palace opposite, were free of traders. Beggars held the cathredal steps by immemorial right, and lolling sentries the steps of the palace.

It was not there that Jack would have to look for Don Pedro, however, for the Dictator was at El Miraflores in the mountains. So, making his way carefully amid the thronging barterers and buyers, so that Victor should not step in a basket of eggs or bowl over one of the numerous peasant babies who seemed to be everywhere, Jack finally gained the mouth of the Calle Escombar. Here the going was less hindered; indeed, there was not a soul in sight. So shaking the reins, he put Victor to the trot, and headed for the suburbs.

At the Summer Capital, however, early though his arrival, Jack found Don Pedro already engaged with callers. Had he been in America, Jack would not have been surprised, for it was 11 o'clock. The ride into the mountains had taken more than two hours. But 11 of the morning was a monstrous early hour for the Valopian Dictator.

Lounging in an anteroom, while awaiting his opportunity to see Don Pedro, Jack expressed to an under-secretary with whom he had some acquaintance the surprise which he experienced at finding Don Pedro already engaged.

"Ah," said the other, "but you see these gentlemen with whom His Excellency, El Presidente, is engaged, spent the night here."

"Officials from some outlying state?"

"No, Senor. Two gentlemen who arrrived from the North on a steamer reaching port last night. They came directly here on landing. An escort met them at the harbor."

The under-secretary subsided, at the approach of a superior. With pity, Jack noted his scared look. The poor fellow doubtless was worried lest he had said something which would get him into trouble.

Then Jack sat back, idly speculating upon what had been told him. The information might mean any one of a number of things. The probability was, however, that the two callers were Administration supporters, bringing news of moment from the northern portion of Valopia, where the rebel movement was rumored to be spreading apace. Doubtless, they had boarded a steamer at Paramba, the only other port of the country. That meant there was a boat in with mail from the United States. Perhaps there would be letters from his father and from Frank and Bob, who, since graduation from Yale had been learning the export business under the tuition of Bob's father. Jack smiled sympathetically. Neither of his comrades had been overjoyed at the prospect of going into business, even though the export com-

pany built up by their parents was a wealthy concern, which some day they would inherit.

"They'll settle down to it in time," he soliloquized. "But it certainly was tough to have our trinity broken up. And then to have me go off on a commission like this—to a picturesque country like Valopia—while they had to settle down to business!"

From these meditations, Jack presently was aroused by a summons to Don Pedro's presence. He entered the ornately furnished library, where the Dictator received callers at El Miraflores. The young army captain who was his guide, a pleasant enough fellow, slightly older than Jack, and with whom he had a speaking acquaintance, regarded him oddly in their walk through the long corridors. And finally, ere ushering Jack into the library, he whispered so low that his voice scarcely carried to Jack's ears, and certainly not to those of a sentry standing a short distance away: "Be careful of what you say, Senor Hampton."

This whispered caution accompanied by a warning glance utterly mystified Jack. But ere he could question the young captain, he was thrust into the library and the door was closed at his back.

Jack had stood in this room before, and its heavy hangings at the windows, great table of polished mahogany, and the walls lined with bookcases were familiar sights. His gaze went at once to the over-

fleshed swarthy man, dressed in white flannels, who remained seated behind the table. Don Pedro's dark eyes under bushy black brows were bent on him in a frowning stare. This in itself was unusual, for the Dictator previously had been genial in his attitude toward Jack. The young fellow's heart sank, as he took in the frown and remembered the captain's whispered caution.

What had happened? he asked himself, as he crossed the room to greet the Dictator. He could find no answer, for he was not aware in his own conduct of anything which should bring him into disfavor. That such was the case, however, became apparent; the Dictator ignored his outstretched hand and did not ask him to be seated.

Jack stood uncomfortably at the end of the table, his "Good morning" delivered in Spanish unanswered. Then indignation at this scurvy reception began to warm him. He had done nothing to merit it. The Dictator still stared, frowning and silent.

"Your Excellency is pleased to be angry with me," Jack finally said, after this situation had endured several long minutes.

He steeled his voice to a coldness which he did not feel. And when no reply was forthcoming, but only that continued rude and glowering stare, he found it still harder to restrain his inner heat. Indeed, he was out of all patience with the other, and wheel-

ing on his heel he said, "Good day," and started toward the door.

Only then did he realize that the young captain who had brought him to the door had followed within the room, and now stood with his back against the exit. A step or two Jack took, but the young captain stood immovable, and it was apparent he had no intention of permitting Jack to withdraw.

"A word with you, Senor Hampton," came the Dictator's voice at this moment, and again Jack swung around.

"So you are pleased to speak." Jack marched back with head high. "And to what, may I ask," he demanded, "do I owe this insulting reception—"

The Dictator's eyes momentarily blazed.

"—of a citizen of the United States?" finished Jack hardily.

The Dictator's eyelids drooped, and with a thrill Jack realized that he had scored. Don Pedro had a wholesome respect of the great Republic del Norte, as the United States was known in Valopia.

When again the Dictator spoke, it was in a more pacific tone. "You may be seated, Senor Hampton," he said. And when Jack pulled forward a chair and sat down facing him, he continued in a tone stern yet softer: "Evil reports of you have come to me and if you had not appeared opportunely here this

morning I should have been compelled to send Captain Miranda yonder with a request that you wait on me at once."

"Evil reports?" Jack laughed. "I can't imagine what you mean. But I wonder, Don Pedro—" a sudden possible explanation of this reception entering his mind— "I wonder," he added, "if you are not trying to frighten me so that I shall abandon my attempts to gain permission to go to San Andres."

"San Andres?" repeated Don Pedro. "Always San Andres. And why this anxiety to go to San Andres?"

"I have told you before, sir," said Jack sturdily. "But I'll repeat it again. My radio experiments are delayed because much of my equipment is at the San Andres station."

"So, it is only to get your equipment that you wish to go to San Andres?"

"Of course."

"It has come to me that you have a different reason."

"A different reason?" Jack was bewildered.

"You seem surprised?"

"I am."

"Shall I tell you what has been told me?"

"By all means."

"It is said that you are in communication with the rebels."

"I?"

"And that your radio experiments are a blind to cloak your spying on us here."

"What arrant nonsense." Jack half rose from his chair.

The Dictator's voice, which had grown more purring, like that of a great cat, remained urbane, but there was a hint of steel in the glove. "Sit down, Senor Hampton. I have but repeated what has been told me."

Jack took a fresh grip on himself. "I deny the charges, of course. Who are my accusers?"

"Not so fast, Senor Hampton. They say that you are in truth a wizard of the radio, but that it is not in the making of experiments that you are employed."

"Then what?" said Jack. "Oh, this is folly."

"Why, it is said"—Don Pedro spoke more slowly even than usual, his eyes searching Jack's face—"it is said that under the cloak of experimental work you spy on our every movement here, and transmit the word to your San Andres station, whence it is carried to the rebels by your assistant."

Jack emitted a short angry laugh. "And do you believe all this claptrap?"

"I have not said that I believed."

"Look here, sir; let's end this foolishness. I've told you before that these charges are untrue. I'll repeat it. So much for that. Now it is necessary for the conclusion of my experiments that I be permitted to send my assistant back to San Andres. You have held me off for several days on the ground that rebels are operating in that region and that they might capture Professor Bonatelli or me, whoever goes to San Andres, and thus embroil you with our government. Now you bring this foolishness forward. Well, let's have an understanding. My people are paying you a large sum every month for freedom to conduct our experiments here. A word from me and those payments will stop."

Don Pedro looked down. Did he start? Jack couldn't be sure, but he pressed boldy on, assured that he held an undeniable advantage. The Dictator always needed money, and the loss of those payments would strike a serious blow at his exchequer.

"In view of all this," said Jack meaningly, "I wonder, sir, if you wouldn't consider it advisable to furnish me an escort of troops to San Andres?"

"Why you and not Professor Bonatelli, who has been there previously?"

"Because," said Jack, "I want to see personally to the packing up of my equipment and its removal to the city."

"Then you would cease your experiments? You would leave us?"

Don Pedro seemed alarmed. Could he be seeing those large sums which the radio interests contributed flying out of the window?

"No," said Jack. "I won't leave until I have concluded my work, unless you make it too unpleasant for me. But, instead, I'll bring back my equipment from San Andres, and set up a station somewhere here within your own lines. Then you need have no worries that I am communicating by radio with the rebels, and giving away your secrets. Not that I know any secrets to give away," he added. And on that, feeling that he was close to gaining his point and that the late unpleasantness was rapidly being smoothed away, he broke into a grin.

Don Pedro sat with eyes cast down, and on the mask of his face no trace of the secret delight which filled him was betrayed.

"Senor Hampton," he said heartily, looking up at length, "you have spoken like a true man, not a traitor. It shall be as you say. Tomorrow Captain Miranda with his troop shall accompany you to San Andres, and you shall bring back your equipment. And to show my confidence, I shall even go further. You will want to set up your station anew at some point other than your home. Is it not so?"

Jack nodded. "Some place outside of the city, so I can get a bit of range."

"A bit of range? I do not know just what you mean. But let that pass." Don Pedro waved a large hand, covered with black hairs reaching down to the knuckles. "Senor Hampton, would El Miraflores be satisfactory to you?"

"You mean that I may set up my station here?" demanded Jack.

"An ideal place, removed from the city, yet safe from the rebels."

Jack thought a moment. Don Pedro evidently wanted to keep him and his radio experimentation under his eye. To refuse would make the Dictator suspicious. Why not accept? Indeed, El Miraflores would do very nicely.

"Very well," he said, rising. "It shall be as you say."

When he faced the door he was surprised to find that Captain Miranda had departed. That discreet young officer, seeing how matters were going, had deemed it unnecessary to stay longer; indeed, he may even have gotten his dismissal by glance or nod from Don Pedro.

Jack departed, fairly satisfied with the outcome of his interview, although puzzled and angry over the charges brought against him. He did not note the look of triumph with which the Dictator saluted his back.

CHAPTER III.

FRIENDS FROM HOME

ANXIOUS though Jack was to return home, in order to carry out the necessary preparations for an early departure with Captain Miranda on the morrow, he yet took time on the homeward journey to halt at a favorite look-out point. Leaving Victor with reins hanging, in the shade of a roadside clump of trees, he parted the bushes on the right and made his way to a bold headland sticking out from the mountain range, whence a far-flung prospect of mountains on either hand, of plain and city below and of sea beyond, could be obtained.

It was, indeed, a fair sight, with the distant city occupying the center of the picture. So clear was the air that, although miles distant, the white walls and red-tiled roofs rising above the palm and plane trees stood out clear. Jack even believed he could distinguish the old mansion he himself occupied, facing the Plaza. Certainly the imposing bulk of the Presidential Palace opposite and the even more inspiring pile of the ancient Cathredral, adjoining his house, were easily distinguished. Even at this

hottest hour of the day, the beggars would be sunning themselves on the broad time-worn Cathredral steps. Jack smiled at the thought.

Not all the city could be seen, however. This more pretentious section stood on a high mesa, somewhat back from the sea. Between it and the harbor front lay a noisome stew of slums cloaked from Jack's eyes. It was just as well, he thought, for now there was nothing to spoil the picture. All was as it should be—the beautiful little city; the green, luxuriant farm lands on either hand; the orange groves behind, running up into the foothills; on the far horizon behind him the mighty peaks of the Cordilleras, and on that other horizon, ahead, the indented harbor between curving arms of land, and, for binding edge to the picture, the blue ribbon of the Atlantic.

Yet as Jack retraced his steps, and, once more on Victor, wound downward toward the city, his thoughts were busy upon the regrettable fact that all this loveliness should be mismanaged by a tyrant.

Jack had no personal interest in the affairs of Valopia; he was solely desirous of bringing to a successful conclusion the experiments in "Radio-Vision" which formed the object of his stay in the so-called Republic. But to find his every movement hampered by a suspicious tyrant, who also wrung tribute from his employers, was galling in the extreme. And so today his thoughts were more than ever filled with

indignation at the state of Valopian affairs. The only satisfaction lay in the fact that in this out-of-the-way country his experimental work was safe from the prying eyes of foreign interests, seeking the same great end as he.

When he entered the sun-scorched plaza and saw his house ahead, however, Jack resolutely put from his mind all thoughts of business, while his eyes roved eagerly to that upstairs window behind its iron grille. Rafaela, however, was not to be seen, although usually she awaited his return with fluttering handkerchief.

He entertained a fleeting wonder if anything was amiss, then laughed at his fears. The market was ended, the traffickers gone. Somnolent beneath the blazing sun lay the plaza, with the plane trees in the little park drooping dustily and the beggars on the Cathedral steps sleepily adroop. Trotting across the uneven cobbles, on which Victor's iron-shod hooves made a ringing sound, Jack hammered on the huge wooden gate of his courtyard, It was opened by a sleepy-eyed Tomaso, aroused from his nap against a shaded wall, who took Victor. Then crossing the courtyard, Jack pushed open a little door into the patio—and at once came to an abrupt amazed halt, scarce believing his eyes.

There were three people in the patio. One Jack was prepared to see—Rafaela. But the others

lounging in long cane chairs beside the fountain, were the two who while most often in his thoughts he had least expected to behold here in Valopia. They were his lifelong chums, Bob Temple and Frank Merrick.

Surprise floored Jack, in a way of speaking, but not his old companions. With whoops of delight, they bounded from their chairs and flung themselves forward. In a thrice all three, Jack in his riding clothes and the others in white flannels, became almost inextricably entwined, while Rafaela, who came down the walk more sedately, looked on laughing until the tears flowed.

Such a hullabaloo! Tomaso looked in from the courtyard, his eyes round as saucers; and old Juan, lifting his fat bulk from the kitchen chair where he snoozed while awaiting the hour to begin preparing dinner, came waddling to the door of his domain, at a far corner of the patio, to twist his gray mustachios and nod in benevolence. He knew a greeting between friends when he saw it.

"Nevertheless," he said aloud, "by all the Saints, these Yankee Senors greet each other strangely. It sounds as if the revolution had begun."

Then he went back and sought to compose himself and finish his nap. But the clock on the wall caught his eye; and, with a sigh for leisure departed, he bestirred himself to poke up the fire and set about

dinner preparations. Had not the Senora Rafaela implored him to do justice to his art, so that she might show the newcomers what culinary marvels a real Valopian chef could perform? Had she not said— "Juan, these poor boys arrived late yesterday on the steamer, and went to the Grand Central Hotel, instead of coming here. They had beastly food for dinner last night and worse for breakfast today. Exhibit now your poetry in cooking." Well, he would do his best; a man could do no more. And sighing profoundly, Juan waddled about his preparations.

In the meantime the turmoil in the patio subsided a bit as Jack and the unexpected guests ran out of breath.

"Where in the world did you come from?" Jack finally demanded, as he moved up the walk between his friends, one hand gripping Rob's bulky shoulder and the other resting on Frank's slimmer form. Rafaela dancing ahead, arranged chairs for the group and laughingly begged them to subside and talk in turn.

"All right for you to say that, Rafaela," argued Jack, pulling her to a seat on the bench beside him. "But you've been talking to them for hours, and know all about it. Remember, this is the biggest surprise of my life. Come through, now, me lads, and tell how you happen to be here. The last I heard

you were both in New York, enjoying the flesh pots."

"Enjoying the flesh pots, nothing," snorted Bob. "You ought to see us slaving away at business."

Chuckling, Jack turned from the spluttering young colossus to pensive Frank. But the latter, betraying not a gleam of amusement, nodded quite violent affirmation of his companion's words.

"Down at nine and work till five," said he sadly. "Learning to be a business man isn't all a bed of roses, old thing. Now you—" And he waved his arm expressively.

"Yes," cried Bob, heaving up in his chair. "Beautiful wife, luxurious home, heavenly surroundings, and"—nostrils twitching like a dog's on the scent—"marvelous cook. Oh, who wouldn't be an inventor?"

"Oh, but Jack works harder than both you boys," Rafaela exclaimed indignantly. "Why, he is busy long into the night at his inventions."

The three sprawling youths burst into hearty laughter. "That's right, Rafaela," cried Jack; don't let 'em pick on me, the big brutes." And Frank, half-enviously added: "You're certainly the lucky fellow, old thing."

"Well, now that you've aired your complaints," said Jack, when peace had been restored, "will you please tell me how two Yale men who are supposed

to be learning how to run the exporting business built up for them by their fathers, come to be galivanting down here?"

"Simple," explained Frank, "we're here because we recognize the great trade possibilities of Valopia—"

"Which, it is true, are undeveloped as yet," added Bob.

"But which we intend to tap by opening here at the capital and seaport a branch of our New York house," Frank concluded.

Jack waved a feeble hand. "Go on, go on, you have me speechless."

"Stay that way," Bob commented, grinning broadly, "and I'll get my story told. Rafaela already has pumped me and Frank, so you can get the details from her. But here is the summary: The idea came to us one day when we were down on the docks and saw a tramp freighter come in from Central America. 'Let's drop in on Jack,' said Frank. 'All right with me if you can find us a good excuse for running away from the job,' said I, never thinking he'd do it: But trust him for the brain work. Not long afterwards he said that an intensive study of Valopian business conditions convinced him the time was ripe for opening a Latin-American branch. Had the face to tell Dad about it," he added in an awed tone.

Frank was imperturbable. "He believed me."

Bob snorted. "Dad knew we were itching for a vacation, and wanted to spend it with you, Jack. So he winked and said we should go ahead."

"And so," cried Frank, bounding up and making a sweeping bow, "you see before you the two emissaries of American business who have come to invade the drowsing—"

But just at that point in his peroration, the sound of several revolver shots fired in rapid succession floated in from the plaza.

Frank stood with mouth agape. "What was that?"

Then Tomaso's blanched face was framed in the courtyard gate. "The revolution," he shrieked, and disappeared. Jack ran down the walk, with the others at his heels. Through the outer gateway, which had been flung open by the curious Tomaso, a corner of the plaza could be seen. A huge mountain of a man was running across the cobbles, revolver in hand. He fired another shot, then swept on out of sight. As Jack started forward, Tomaso came in from the plaza, with hands deprecatingly outspread.

"It is only the butcher from the Street of the Three Angels, Senor," he said. "The pig he was about to kill escaped him."

Returning to the patio, Jack chuckled and clapped

Frank on the back. "And you said this town was drowsing!"

"Jack," said Rafaela, when they had regained the patio, "dinner won't be ready for another hour and a half. I must have a talk with Juan and see to various things. Don't you want to show the boys what you are working on?"

"We asked about your work first thing on arrival," explained Frank. eagerly. "But Rafaela begged us to await your coming."

Both Frank and Bob were radio enthusiasts; and, indeed, in technical knowledge were second only to Jack. The trio on various of their adventurous exploits had made use of radio to the full.

"Righto," said Jack, preparing to lead the way to his laboratory. "But you speak of your arrival? When did you come?"

"Oh, we've been here since early morning," Frank said. "Poor Rafaela has had us on her hands since shortly after you rode away to visit this Don Pedro bird she's been talking about. You see," he hastened to add, "we spent last night at the Gran Centrale, after landing late from the steamer, and—"

But with an exclamation Jack interrupted.

"The steamer, of course. Why didn't I think of that before hand? Nobody home." And he rapped his head smartly with knuckled fist, while emitting a humorous groan.

But the others who could not understand his thought looked at him in amazement. Thereupon Jack briefly explained. They were now in the laboratory, and he had started toward his electric-photographic apparatus, preparatory to showing the others what he had accomplished. Instead, he kicked forward some boxes for Bob and Frank, and himself took seat on a table.

"To get this," he said, "you'll have to be told what happened at El Miraflores today."

Thereupon, he launched into an account of his visit to the Dictator. "And so, you see," he said in conclusion, "two men who were aboard that steamer with you are at the root of the trouble. It is they who have sought to embroil me with the Dictator by charging that my experimental work is really a blind and that in reality I am a spy of the revolutionists. Now there couldn't have been many passengers abroad that steamer; you must have seen them all, and, perhaps, you can give me some inkling as to who these men might be."

He glanced hopefully from one to the other, but neither was observing him. Instead, Frank and Bob were gazing at each other with nodding heads.

"The scoundrels," Bob commented to Frank, "they certainly lost no time."

And Frank, grave-faced, nodded agreement.

CHAPTER IV.

JACK HEARS OF TROUBLE MAKERS

JACK was nonplussed.

"What do you mean?" he demanded, leaning forward so violently that various couplings and other odds and ends of apparatus which were loosely strewn over the top of the table danced and jiggled precariously.

Bob, the tease, ordinarily would have enjoyed to the full the possession of information which his friend craved, and would have delayed giving it. But the situation was too serious for fun-making.

"We know who is making trouble for you, Jack," he said, gravely. "At least," he amended, "we think we do."

"Think?" exploded Frank. "No question about it."

"But why—why—" spluttered Jack. "Why didn't you tell me earlier?"

"Be reasonable, Jack," said Frank. "We didn't think much of it at the time—that is, when we stumbled on this information aboard ship. It's only

now that you tell us about your interview with Don Pedro that we can put two and two together."

Jack waved the objection aside. "Forget it. I know you mean well. But"—and he ran his fingers through his tumbled hair, while smiling ruefully, "but you don't know what I've been up against with this chap, the Dictator. I'm worn to a frazzle with worry. And now this episode out at El Miraflores today—well," he concluded, "I feel as if I were sitting on a volcano and somebody whom I couldn't see was sneaking up to touch it off."

Frank nodded sympathetically. Big Bob started to talk, but halfway through a sentence called a halt and turned to his shipmate. "You tell him, Frank. I'm not much of a hand at this sort of thing."

"All right." Frank waited a moment, collecting his thoughts, then began:

"After all, there isn't a great deal to tell. We picked up the steamer at Havana, transhipping from one of the Shipping Board liners bound for the great South American ports. The only ship we could get to bring us here was a slow boat carrying both passengers and freight. You know all about that, however, so there's no use going into it; although I want to talk to you some time about that trip. It's—"

"Get along, get along," snorted Bob impatiently, "or I'll be tempted to tell this myself. He was moonstruck, Jack," he explained, "that Southern Moon

and Southern Sea. Good thing there were no senoritas aboard, or—"

He ceased abruptly, as Frank neatly hooked the tilted box from beneath him and brought him to the floor with a thud.

"So perish all defamers," said Frank calmly. "Keep off now, fellar, or Jack never will hear this story."

Big Bob grumbled. "Huh. Well, go on and tell it then. That's one I owe you."

"One night Bob and I were leaning on the rail after dinner," Frank resumed. "The ship had steamed into a little harbor and dropped her mudhook. Lights on the shore, the lights of a small city; enormous mountains behind, and over all the Moon.

" 'What place is this?' I asked a deck hand passing near us. 'And why are we stopping?'

" 'This is Paramba, Senor,' he answered in Spanish, the language in which, of course, I had addressed him. 'It is in Valopia, and here we take on passengers.'

" 'But why don't we tie up at a dock, then?'

" 'Senor, there is no dock. See, here come the passengers now.'

"And with that he left us to go to the landing stage, to which a wheezing puttering launch was creeping across the moonlit water. Two men got out of the launch carefully, mounted the ladder, and were met on deck by a barefoot steward who showed

them to a cabin. Two deck hands followed with their grips.

"We speculated a little as to who they were. Both were white men; that much we had seen in the moonlight. Travellers, we thought, on some unknown mission of business or pleasure.

"We continued to lean there, in the moonlight, while the steamer got up her anchor again with a groan, and once more started to wallow out to sea. She acted for all the world like an awfully tired old woman who wanted nothing more than a chance to lie down and sleep but who had to keep on going because her work wasn't yet done. She swung south, and now, on her new course, the shadow of a lifeboat suspended overhead fell on us. It was very thick and black, because of that flood of moonlight. We fell silent, and contiued to lean there, unmoving, like a part of the furniture of the ship.

"Presently I became aware of a low murmur of voices close at hand. At first the sound made little impression on me, for I'll admit I was dreaming on my feet. I challenge you, Jack, to lean on the rail in that moonlight and not fall to dreaming. Old Bob, I thought, was dreaming too. But evidently the materialist in him found it harder to yield, because suddenly he reached out and gripped me by an arm.

" 'Listen,' he whispered, so low I could barely

distinguish the words, 'I think they're talking about Jack.'

"So, then, as you may imagine, I shook off my day-dreaming. And at once I became aware of this murmur of voices from some place behind us.

" 'In their cabin,' breathed Bob. 'The two newcomers.'

"Fortunately, we both had thrown dark topcoats over us, for the night was cool. I felt confident that we were not especially outstanding objects in that dark blot of shadow. Nevertheless, I turned very sowly and cautiously, making no stir or sound.

"The window of their deck cabin was so close that it seemed I could reach out and touch it. One man was sitting on his berth, smoking. The other was standing up before the mirror, shaving. They were middle-aged men, with iron-gray hair, rather closely clipped, and sharp, pointed mustaches. Unmistakably foreign in appearance, and when next I heard them speak I looked quickly at Bob.

" 'German?' I breathed. He nodded.

"And German they were. Luckily, I know something of the language, and Bob, too. Bob said they were talking about you, but when I listened in it was not of you Jack, but of some radio sharp in Leipsic that they spoke.

" 'So Heinemann says he will not be ready for

six months yet,' said the man on the bed, as if concluding an earlier remark.

"For a moment or two there was silence. Then the fellow who was shaving turned about, so that the light fell full on his face. Half was lathered, the other half scraped clean. He flourished his safety razor to emphasize his words.

" 'And that means a year,' he declared emphatically. 'We must find out what this smart young American is doing, and stop him if possible.'

" 'If possible?' said the other coolly. 'Leipsic will hear of no impossibility. If Hampton's efforts to solve the problem of Radio-Vision are succeeding, we must stop him at all costs. Otherwise, we may look for instant discharge and ruin. You are getting old, Carl; to talk of impossibilities.'

"The shaver shrugged and turned again toward the glass.

" 'Perhaps I am getting old, Otto,' said he. 'But I know enough not to put too much faith in Dictators.'

"With that the man on the berth got up and stretched his arms wide in a yawn. Then he turned toward the window. By that time Bob and I were looking out to sea again, and were still as mice, our heads buried in our shoulders. For a moment, silence. Then the slam of the window closing.

We peered around. The shutter had been slammed.

" 'Come on,' said Bob. 'He'll be nosing out here in a moment to see who we are. But he'll have to put on a shirt first.'

"So away we scooted to our stateroom, and whether he went to look for us, this Otto, I don't know. But it's a good bet that he did, and that he's still wondering who were those two immovable figures in the shadow of the lifeboat who must have overheard him. Of course, he probably figures they were deck hands, who wouldn't understand a word of German."

"But the next day?" suggested Jack.

"We were conspicuous in white, and tucked our topcoats into our baggage. We saw them at meals, but had no conversation with them. Then last night we landed. Thought we'd see them at the Gran Centrale, but they disappeared at the dock. Of course, after what you were told out at El Miraflores today, the reason becomes apparent. They were expected and were met by the President's car, and taken out to his summer palace."

As Frank concluded, Jack leaped down from the table and began excitedly to pace up and down the floor.

"You've solved the mystery, fellows," he said. "It's beginning to clear up. Heinemann, the man

they mentioned, is the great radio engineer of a big Leipsic company producing apparatus. I knew he was working on experiments in 'Radio Vision,' just as are the best English and French engineers, too. I pulled out of America to conduct my own experiments, because I felt pretty certain the Germans would spy on me if I stayed around home. But I thought I had shaken them off in coming down here." He shook his head, and continued his tramping.

"Apparently you haven't," said Bob. "These fellows are on your trail all right."

"Yes," added Frank, "and they lost no time in striking."

"That's right," said Jack, coming to a pause in front of one of his two friends. "And say, look here. They've not only poisoned the Dictator's mind against me, but they've manipulated so as to get my appartus in their own control. Oh, gosh, what a fix!"

"What do you mean?" said Bob, puzzled.

But Frank's faster-working wits had already grasped the situation, and he bounced to his feet fronting Jack.

"You've told the Dictator that you'll go out to San Andres and get your apparatus, and then bring it back and set it up in his palace at El Miraflores, haven't you?"

Jack groaned. "Dunce that I was. I thought I

was overawing him, and all the time he was merely manipulating me into position to do what the German's wanted done."

"I see it now," cried Bob, as excited as his companions. "And when your apparatus is at the palace, what's to prevent the Germans from examining it and learning everything you've done!"

"Listen, fellows," said Jack. "They wouldn't stop at that. They'll work it so that the Dictator confiscates my apparatus on some specious ground—say, that the charges of my conspiring with the rebels have been substantiated. Then the Germans would get possession of all my 'Radio Vision' apparatus without ever once appearing in the matter themselves. What recourse would I have?"

"Shucks," scorned Bob. "You're an American citizen, and a prominent one at that. Get the American Minister after the Dictator."

"Couldn't be done," said Jack. "The Minister is back in the United States on sick leave, and the Charge d'Affaires is a weak sister. By the time I got action from Washington, my stuff would be halfway to Leipsic."

"Well, let's think it over," suggested Frank. "There must be some way out. We've been up worse trees before, and managd to get down." And he threw an arm over Jack's shoulders.

Big Bob's action was equally characteristic. He

flexed a mighty arm. "Bring on your Dictators and your Fritzes," he said.

Jack looked from one to the other with shining eyes.

"It's darned good to have you lads show up just when I need a friend," he said simply.

"Oh, we'll find a way out," Frank declared confidently. "Listen. Isn't that the dinner bell? Come on. Lead the way to your bathroom while I wash my hands and slick my hair. Mustn't keep the little wife waiting. We'll talk it over while we eat. Maybe she'll have a thought to offer. Women are pretty good that way."

CHAPTER V.

A NEW "DICTATOR" DICTATES

DINNER in big Bob's opinion, was not a matter to be treated lightly, especially so delicious a dinner as Juan prepared in consultation with his mistress. When Frank almost at once would have re-introduced the subject of Jack's predicament, Bob issued an emphatic veto.

"Have a heart," the big fellow implored. "Since leaving Havana I've been half starved. The food on the coaster might have been worse, but I can't see how. And the cooking at the Gran Centrale leaves a good deal to be desired. You've got a jewel of a cook, Rafaela. Don't let the fellow spoil Juan's masterpiece of a dinner by talking business. Talk about life in Valopia, give me an idea of what things are like down here, if you will. That is the kind of conversational sauce which helps you to appreciate good food, without distracting your thoughts from the main theme. But, for Pete's sake, no business, time enough afterwards for that. I want to enjoy this dinner."

This dictum was laughingly accepted. So dinner at the candle-shaded table under the palms of the patio, with the fountain tinkling musically beside, was an affair of gay badinage and chatter. Both Rafaela and Jack fell in with Bob's request, so that the two newcomers were treated to a racy description of life in Valopia, where the distinctions of family and breeding still set the social standard and where life moved with gracious mellowness except when broken by revolutions.

"Although," said Jack, "Don Pedro has maintained order for a number of years, and revolutions are a thing of the past. His brutal oppressive tactics, however, are now bearing a crop of trouble. Revolution is stirring in the North, and I for one have an idea that the movement is gaining considerable strength."

"Keep away from such serious conversation," warned Bob peremptorily. "Let us discuss Don Pedro later, but right now stick to a lighter vein while I digest these strange dishes Juan continues to serve. Tell me about the band concerts in the plaza every night and how the fashionables drive around and around while the dandies saunter and ogle the ladies."

"Listen, Roberto Cavallero," commanded Frank with burlesque gravity. "Keep away from the senoritas, because if you fall in love with a Valopian

beauty I'll have to cable Marje to come down. You know how she made me promise to look out for you."

Bob blushed and gulped on a mouthful of food, to the great amusement of his companions. They knew that his schoolboy attachment for the charming girl whom his sister, Della, used to invite to spend vacations at the Temple home on Long Island, had grown stronger through the years. Whether Bob and Marjorie had an understanding was not known, but that such was the case was suspected.

"Yes, you promised her to look out for me," he said with clumsy sarcasm. "You were too busy making eyes at Della to see Marje."

And now it was Frank who became the object of laughter. But he rallied manfully, and, more subtle than Bob, managed by the use of a deft question or two to launch Rafaela on the subject of local customs.

So the dinner passed. And at its end, in came Professor Bonatelli, who was drawn into the conversation which, spurred perhaps by his arrival, turned at once to Jack's situation. A recluse by nature and likewise many years older than his young chief, Professor Bonatelli chose to reside at the Gran Centrale rather than in the house with Jack and Rafaela.

He was told of the deductions that couriers of the great Heinemann and the Leipsic radio firm had taken a hand in Jack's business affairs in Valopia.

At once he was reduced to a state of twittering fear. Bob and Frank regarded him contemptuously; what a poor assistant to Jack, they thought. They even wondered whether it had been wise to place him in possession of information regarding the real status of affairs. However, after excusing himself and going to the laboratory to potter around, Jack set their doubts at rest. Bonatelli, he confided, was a nervous timid man, but true as steel.

"If you say so, all right," grumbled Bob. "But he looks like a weak sister to me. I wouldn't put much trust in a man as scarey as that."

For a time the discussion of how to meet and combat the approaching crisis in Jack's affairs went on without any suggestions of value being offered. That the situation was bad, was plain; indeed, it could not be much worse. On the morrow would come Captain Miranda with a troop of the Dictator's horse to escort Jack to San Andres. Ostensibly, Jack was to be favored by the Dictator; he was to be allowed to bring away his experimental equipment and set up his station under Don Pedro's protection at El Miraflores. In reality, however, he would merely be turning over the fruits of his labors in "Radio Vision" to the Germans who had won the Dictator to their side.

"The way I look at it, Jack," Bob said, "it will be up to you to bid higher for the Dictator's favor

than the Germans. He's a man with a price. Already you have paid him considerable sums under the cloak of licenses. But the Germans have paid him more. So you'll just have to top them. I suppose your people would stand for it all right, rather than lose your discoveries."

Jack gloomed. "If that is the only way out, yes," he assented. "But, in the first place, how am I going to be able to communicate with New York and explain the whole situation so that they can see the necessity for contributing more money? The cable isn't the best way in the world for transmitting information. And while I'm trying to get permission to offer a price to the Dictator, what's to prevent the German's from going ahead and seizing all my work. Besides," he added resolutely, "I don't like that method. There must be some other way. All we have to do is to find it."

"Well," said Bob, "I don't like dirty business, either. So that's out. The only other plan I can offer is that you put us up here, so that we can lick the Valopian army when it arrives."

He spoke with such matter-of-fact seriousness that his companions burst into hearty laughter, and Rafaela patted him on the head with a "You're a dear, Bob." The gravity of the discussion was effectively relieved, and ere faces could again grow

long, Frank who had been doing some quiet but effective thinking, spoke up.

"That's just what we don't want to do, Bob," he said. "We don't want to come here to live. We must stay on the outside; indeed, we must keep clear of Jack, so that our friendship won't be suspected. Only so can we help him."

"If I didn't know that you've got an idea coming up, I'd say you were crazy," said Bob, half-angrily. "Not stand by Jack? What do you mean?"

"Shucks, old thing, you know I wouldn't leave Jack in the lurch any more than would you," said Frank. "No, here's the idea: We'll rent a house in Valopia and set up housekeeping on our own account. And Jack shall turn over to us whatever part of his 'Radio-Vision' apparatus forms the key to all. There must be some part of your apparatus, Jack," he added, addressing the other directly, "without which the others would be useless, or else I miss my guess."

"There is, there is," said Jack, in some excitement. "It is what I call the Synchcronizer."

"And without it, your other apparatus would be useless?"

"The Synchronizer must be turned over to us for safekeeping," Frank emphatically declared.

"Bully boy," roared Bob, as relieved as if a great weight had been lifted from his shoulders.

But Jack was not so elated. "To hide the Synchronizer would certainly spike the guns of the Germans," he said. "But—"

"But what?"

"The Germans wouldn't give up until they found it. Soon or late suspicion would point to you. And then you'd be in trouble."

Rafaela rose swiftly and went to Jack's side. "Oh, we must not let our good friends fall into that horrible man's power on our account," she said. "Jack, this Synchron—Synchronizer, can't you destroy it?"

"Well, that would keep it out of the enemy's hands, all right," said Jack, slowly. "But I might not be able to put it together again later, and get the same good results. Besides, re-assembly would take time. Meanwhile, Heinemann, over in Leipsic, is working away furiously. And if I am long delayed in getting my invention home to New York and on the market, Heinemann may get ahead of us. No, if necessary, I'll smash the Synchronizer and everything else, rather than have my invention fall into other hands. But let's see if a better way doesn't offer. Oh, if only the American Minister hadn't taken this time to fall sick and go home. We could seal the stuff in the Legation and cable up the American gunboats at Panama."

"Is that out of the question?"

"Entirely," said Jack. "The man in charge of

the Legation is only an understrapper, and a weak sister at that. No help to be looked for there."

Bob and Frank looked at each other. Without an interchange of words, they were in perfect accord. And at Bob's nod of re-assurance, Frank spoke up.

"We're willing to take the chance of falling foul of the Dictator, Jack," he said. "You must let us have the Synchronizer to hide for you. We'll rent a house tomorrow; surely, that ought to be an easy matter. In fact, Bob and I took a walk this morning, early, before coming here, because we didn't want to disturb you at too early an hour; and around the corner from the Gran Centrale we saw an old mansion something like this which was for rent."

"The Pedrarias place," said Rafaela. "It has been vacant many months. We looked at it ourselves, but decided to take this house instead, because it was in better repair."

Frank laughed. "We won't worry about the repairs. Bob puts any house in bad shape quickly, anyhow. He's like a baby elephant."

"Huh." Big Bob merely grunted. "Too full of food to stir, feller, or I'd teach you not to malign your betters."

"But I can't let you take this chance." Jack was obstinately determined.

Frank glanced at him pityingly. "Do you think you can stop us? You've stood by us in a pinch times

without number. No, protest all you please, but we're going to rent that Pedrarias place in the morning, and then we'll hide your Synchronizer away before you get back from San Andres. Then let the enemy rave."

"It's all settled, Jack," said Bob, heaving up and clapping a big hand over the other's lips to smother further protest. "And now come on, let's go to that balcony of yours and look at the Valopian fashion parade. I've been hearing the orchestra for the last hour, and it isn't so bad."

"All right, I surrender. But you'll have to count me out of the balcony scene. Rafaela will take care of you. If you're bound to take the Synchronizer, I'll go in and take it apart and pack it up, along with some other stuff."

"Better let me come along," said Frank. "Some need for me to put it together again may arise, and I ought to know how."

Accordingly, Rafaela and Bob sought the balcony overlooking the Plaza, while Frank accompanied Jack to the laboratory. Professor Bonatelli was still at work. A thought striking Frank, he drew Jack aside and whispered behind the older man's back. Jack looked thoughtful, nodded, and then suggested to his assistant that he had worked long enough and should go to the balcony to hear the concert. As the Professor was passionately fond of music, he

readily complied. Not until he had disappeared and the door had been locked behind him, did Jack approach the queer-looking machine mounted so as to resemble a large photographer's camera, which we have seen him fondly contemplate on a previous occasion.

"So that's it," said Frank, "so that's the Synchronizer. Glad you dismissed Bonatelli. He may be true, but he's weak. So it's best for him not to know that we are taking charge of your apparatus. If the Dictator ever put the screws on him, in search of information, he'd be liable to tell."

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH THE "KEY" IS HID

WHILE Jack busied himself in taking the Synchronizer apart, he entered at the same time into a detailed explanation of his invention. Frank's old love of radio, which had been somewhat thrust into the background the past year by reason of his devotion to the export business, came welling back. He listened eagerly, asking leading questions when Jack's sketchy expanation failed to make certain points clear; and soon was in possession of the facts.

Invention of "Radio-Vision" machines had been claimed for some time by foreign scientists, Frank knew. Heretofore, however, they had not been successful in practice. Now Frank learned the real reason thereof.

"There has always been a missing link," Jack explained, "which spelled failure. Now I have found that link. It is the Synchronizer."

The principle of Jack's invention, he continued, was practically the same as that employed in the telegraphing of photographs. Here, however, the prob-

lem was not to transmit a single picture by telegraph, but to send a whole moving picture film which would unroll before the eyes of an audience any number of miles away as fast as it was "shot" by the camera—and to send it, not by telegraph, but by radio.

A single picture could be telegraphed in five to ten minutes, Jack explained, whereas, in order to produce a moving picture, at least ten pictures would have to be sent every second. In other words, in order to make "Radio Vision" practicable, a way would have to be found to send pictures by radio at the rate of one-tenth of a second to a picture. This Jack claimed his invention would accomplish.

"But that wasn't the biggest thing," he continued. "To find the way to send pictures as rapidly as that was a comparatively simple task. It merely involved a speeding-up process along lines already established. But the biggest difficulty, and the one which had stumped every other scientist, was to find a way to synchronize the pictures at the receiving end, as fast as they arrived, so that a complete film would be reproduced."

"And that," asked Frank, "is what this Synchronizer will do?" And he pointed to the camera-like machine which Jack was disassembling.

Jack nodded. "That's exactly what it will do."

Frank's eyes shone as he emitted a low whistle. "Golly, boy," he said, "think of what you will open

up! Why, once your invention hits the world market, people will be able to sit at home with the little old radio and see the great football games and baseball games unroll before their eyes."

Jack laughed heartily. "Righto, sport. And even though it may not be so interesting they'll be able to take in famous parades, political rallies, and all that sort of thing, as well as sporting events."

Frank absorbedly watched the stowing away of the various parts, which Jack was wrapping tenderly in cotton wool and placing in the compartments of a specially designed travelling case. Presently he broke forth again.

"But, Jack, will you be able to synchronize sound with sight, so that people can not only see distant scenes, but hear all that is being said, too?"

Jack stood up, his face grave. "That's exactly what this apparatus will do, old boy," he said. "And that's why I'd give an arm to be safely out of this country with my invention. The foreign scientists, so far as I know, are close on my heels with the solution of broadcasting sights, but I'm definitely ahead of them with with synchronization of sight and sound. In other words, I believe I am the first man to solve the problem of 'speaking movies,' and do it by radio. Therefore, if these German plotters seize my invention, well—"

Frank, who had been crouching on his heels, help-

ing to adjust the stowing away of the Synchronizer, shot up and threw an arm over the shoulders of Jack standing above him. "We'll beat them, old feller," he said. "Don't worry. You and Bob and I have luck with us. It'll go hard, indeed, if we don't come out on top. Well, now that the Synchronizer is packed, let's see just where we stand."

After a brief review of the situation, it was decided that Frank and Bob should carry with them a small but compact two-way radio set of the familiar field pattern, as well as the Synchronizer. This resolution was to have a profound bearing on their future fortunes, but in a way totally different from anything they could now foresee. That Jack should turn over such a set to them, was Frank's proposal. And the reason he advanced was that, in case Jack became too deeply involved in the clutches of Don Pedro to help himself, he and Bob might be able to reach the American warships at Panama or Guantanamo, Cuba, and bring up a gunboat to the rescue.

"But the field set's range isn't great enough," objected Frank.

"I know, I know," said Frank. "But there are American freighters in these waters, and it's quite possible one might pick up and relay any message."

At last the packing was accomplished. The Synchronizer had been stowed away in its compact case; the field set the same. The two cases, resembling

extra large travelling cases, stood on the floor of the laboratory side by side. Jack looked at his watch.

"Took us only forty minutes," he said. "The band concert will still be going on. Suppose we go and join Rafaela and Bob on the balcony."

Frank agreeing, they turned off the lights and left the laboratory. Jack locked the door and dropped the key in a pocket. On the balcony they found Professor Bonatelli with the others. Bob looking up at their approach started to question them, but Frank silenecd him, with finger to lips and a warning glance toward Professor Bonatelli, who was leaning forward absorbed in the music.

Shortly the concert came to an end, and then Professor Bonatelli made his adieux and departed. Bob and Rafaela were immediately put in possession of the facts regarding what had been done. Then the conversation turned on the future. But, as Bob said, yawning, speculation was unprofitable. Who knew what lay ahead? Let them meet issues as they arose.

Frank laughed, clapping his big comrade affectionately on a broad shoulder.

"This is going to be a more subtle game, old thing, than we have been up against in the past," he said. "It won't be a question of pitching somebody out of a window. We are in the enemy's country, and there is nobody to depend on except ourselves. If we fail to look ahead and plan we'll be out of luck."

"Oh, I don't know," said Bob. "They can't all be enemies around us. Remember what Jack said about Don Pedro being detested by the patriots of Valopia. Somewhere there are good revolutionists around here who might lend a hand, if we holler for help."

Frank's eyes gleamed. "He's not such a dull boy, after all, Jack."

The latter nodded, thoughtful-browed. "Bob put his finger on something. Though—" with a shake of the head, and a mocking twinkle of the eye—"how he happened to think of that, I don't know."

Secretly, big Bob was a bit amazed at the agreeable reception of his suggestion. He was accustomed to look on his comrades as the thinkers of the group, and himself as less ready-witted. But cloaking any amazement, he put on a bored air. "Oh, just an idea," he said. "I often have them."

"Now," said Frank, " all we have to do, in case of trouble, is find the revolutionists. Pending that"—and he stood up—"let's go to bed and get some sleep."

He called attention to the fact that Rafaela already had retired, and advised that Jack had better do likewise, in order to be prepared for making an early start for San Andres on the morrow. The crowd in the Plaza long since had departed. Not a straggler of that gay parade was left.

"And, Jack," he added, in conclusion, "I've been thinking things over, and it strikes me that Bob and I better take the Synchronizer and the two-way set with us tonight. Who knows but that when Captain Miranda calls for you tomorrow he may seize all your apparatus? You think now that you will have some days of grace and that events will develop gradually. But, remember, the German plotters who are swaying Don Pedro against you are eager for only one thing—and that is to get possession of your invention."

Jack sat thoughtful-browed and silent, while Frank and Bob gazed at him expectantly. Then he looked up, determination in his eyes. "You're right, Frank. Best thing is to hide the Synchronizer away while there is yet time. But—how? To carry those two big cases into your hotel will arouse comment. Somebody would notice, and when a search was made later that fact would come to light."

Bob deprecated. "Oh, nobody will be awake when we turn in. Why, I don't believe they even have a night clerk at the Gran Centrale."

But Frank knuckled his forehead. "I have it," he said. "Bob and I will just take those two cases and slip around by the Pedrarias place on our way to the hotel. We can hide them in the shrubbery. The patio is overgrown with trees and shrubs. You

could hide a regiment there without discovery. Then tomorrow we'll rent the house. How's that?"

Bob heaved to his feet. "Good," he said, "good. Come on."

The house was asleep. The three felt like conspirators as, putting the laboratory behind them, and carrying the heavy cases, they tiptoed downstairs and through the patio to the courtyard.

"Out the back gate," whispered Jack. "Lucky there's no moon."

He led the way to a small door in the rear wall. Opening it, he stepped outside and peered long up and down the quiet tree-lined byway. Beside him was a high brick wall, running off into the shadows, the rear wall of his courtyard and of the property adjoining. Nobody was to be seen.

"Come on," he said, turning back. And as Bob and Frank emerged, he closed the door and led the way to the right.

The Pedrarias mansion, behind its high protecting walls over which drooped the branches of dusty trees, was reached without detection. The gate was barred, so Bob and Jack gave Frank a leg-up, as the lightest, and dropping over the wall he unlocked the gate and admitted the others. Quiet and ghostly lay the house behind the dense foliage of the patio. Deep in the recesses of the shrubbery, the two cases of equipment were secreted. Then Bob and Jack de-

parted, Frank locked the gate behind them, and dropping over the wall, rejoined them in the deserted street.

"Good luck, Jack."

"We've got 'em licked, old man."

Hands were tight-gripped.

"When I come back from San Andres, Don Pedro may keep me at El Miraflores under pretty close surveillance," said Jack. "I'm not afraid for my life, or anything like that. But I do wish Rafaela were safely out of this."

"We'll keep an eye on her," Bob and Frank promised, in one breath.

Jack's eyes moistened a trifle. He was glad it was dark. "I knew you would," he said. "But, remember, it won't do to come to the house because we don't want it known that we are friends, as that would bring you under suspicion."

"We'll find a way to keep in touch with you," said Frank. "That back door in your courtyard! Anyhow, we've got the Synchronizer where the enemy can't find it. And that's all we can do for the time being," he added sensibly. "Now we must await developments before the next step becomes clear."

"Oh, shucks," grunted Bob. "You and your developments. All I wish is that I had tossed those two fellows overboard when we discovered them aboard ship."

The others chuckled. "Bloodthirsty Bob," said Jack affectionately, clapping his big comrade of other days. "Well, I must toddle along, or I won't be able to get up tomorrow. Say, I guess you know how glad I am you turned up."

And then, as a distant footstep sounded, Jack with a muttered farewell and a "Won't do to be seen together," darted away and was lost in the shadows. The others headed for the Plaza and the Gran Centrale, while the footsteps grew louder and presently a shadowy form appeared. They met near a feeble street lantern, its rays revealing a blue coated dark figure wearing a military cap.

"Officer," said Bob genially, in Spanish, "just taking a stroll after the concert. Are we headed right for the Gran Centrale?"

"Aye, Senor. It lies ahead." And the little policeman pointed with his truncheon.

"Thanks. A fine night." And they passed on.

"Good thing he didn't come along a few minutes earlier, as we were leaving the Pedrarias place," said Bob.

"Or as I was climbing the wall," chuckled Frank. Do you think he suspected anything?"

"Huh." Bob grunted. "No, thinks we're just crazy Americanos. Well, here's the hotel. Me for bed."

CHAPTER VII.

A VISITATION FROM THE DICTATOR

THE next day Frank and Bob lost no time in searching out the agent who handled the Pedrarias property. Terms were soon arranged, and for a price which seemed to their New York standard of values ridiculously low they were placed in full and complete possession of a rambling mansion as big as a chateau, filled with heavy furniture of archaic design, much of which had been brought from Spain. When they moved, no grass grew under their feet. The middle of the afternoon found them not only established in the house, but with food in the larder and a cook in the kitchen preparing it.

Over this cook, Manuel, hovered Antonio. It is time to speak of the latter. He had attached himself to the persons of the two young fellows in New York. One day he had appeared before them to request that they employ him as man-servant and guide when visiting Valopia.

"But who told you we were going to Valopia?" asked the amazed Frank.

"Ah, senor, do you not make open arrangements to go to my country?"

"So you are a Valopian?"

"Si, senor. But, I beg of you, when we arrive in my native land, speak of me as a Mexican. I have reasons—"

At first, Frank refused to employ him. But Antonio was not one to be lightly refused. In appearance, he was inconspicuous, a slender, dark man of medium height and indeterminate middle age. But there was something winning in his manner, in his calm assumption that he could be of use, something so engaging in the glance of his dark eyes and the manly yet gentle voice which Frank found irresistible. The upshot was that he had been engaged.

In the negotiations to obtain the Pedrarias place, Antonio had proved invaluable. It was he who found the agent, he who conducted the negotiations and obtained the house at a rental so low as to astound his masters. It was he who found and employed Manuel as cook. Now, while Frank and Bob wandered about the jungle-like patio, peering now and again toward the bushes behind which they already had surreptitiously assured themselves their treasures lay undisturbed, Antonia held converse with Manuel.

The boys thought he was engaged in ordering the dinner. Had they overheard the conversation they would have been astounded beyond measure.

"That you should venture into Valopia, ah, ah—" Manuel spoke with a shake of the head.

"Bah." Antonio snapped his fingers contemptuously. "Who is there to recognize the youth of five

years ago? The years have aged me, and I am forgotten."

"But I knew you."

"Thou wert my servant twenty years."

"Your old friends—"

"Think, Manuel. Like me they have been scattered, fled, their estates confiscated."

"But he, the Dictator—"

"Would not know me, did we meet face to face. 'Twas not I he knew, but my estates. It was on them he laid covetous eyes day after day, until—" Antonio was silent, his expressive mouth forming into a thin hard straight line. Then he shrugged. "I have good reports of thee, old friend. Already have I seen certain ones who speak highly of thy stout spirit. Ah, well, Manuel, better days are coming for us both."

And with an enigmatic glance, which an observer would have been puzzled to read but which seemed plain enough to both, Manuel turned to his dinner preparations and Antonio retreated to arrange the contents of his masters' trunks.

The house had been put in order when the last Pedrarias had moved out of it to the graveyard, leaving it to be administered by an agent in favor of descendants who preferred life on their country estates to dwelling in town. Nevertheless, it was dusty and close-smelling, with the odor of rooms long-closed. In it was a considerable library of Spanish, French and even some English publications, among

which at some other time the boys would be content to settle down for an evening's reading. This first night, however, found them unwilling to stay indoors, more especially with the house in its then state.

"To-morrow I shall have in the cleaners, senor," said Antonio to Frank, while serving dinner. "Soon the house will be delightful again, as it must have been in other days. Also, I shall restore the patio, which needs pruning and weeding."

By the exercise of considerable self-control, his auditors managed to refrain from casting startled glances at each other upon his reference to the patio, while Frank commented:

"Good, Antonio. But for tonight we have no desire to stay in so disordered a house, and so we intend to go to the Plaza for the concert.

"And to visit your friend, the Senor Hampton, as yesterday?"

Now, indeed, Frank and Bob did glance at each other in dismay. For the moment they had forgotten that Antonio was aware of their friendship with Jack; indeed, on the journey from New York they had told him that to visit their old comrade was the principal reason for their trip to Valopia. Here, at the very time when they must keep secret that intimacy with Jack, if they were to be of aid to him in his perilous situation, loomed the possibility of betrayal.

Antonio was not unaware that some secret disquietude had smitten his two masters, and that a

silent but none the less intense communication was going on between them as glances crossed. Unaware, however, of the fact that Jack was in disfavor with the Dictator, he could not fathom the meaning of the quite obvious dismay of his two employers. He, therefore, kept silent, after his question, moving about the table and presenting dishes with a certain clumsiness that belied his claims to years of service.

A glance from Bob, accompanied by a nod of the head, quite definitely checked the responsibility of reply up to Frank. The latter started to speak, stammered, cleared his throat, then went on firmly.

"Antonio."

"Si, senor."

"We can trust you?"

Antonio's brows went up. "But, of course."

"This is a matter of the greatest importance."

Antonio put down his dish, and stood very grave. "I hear, senor."

Frank was at a loss as to how to proceed. That Antonio was to be taken into their confidence was not to be thought of. Although he felt that this rather mysterious man-of-all-jobs was truly to be trusted, he could assign no reason for his belief. The circumstances under which Antonio had entered his employ recurred to him. He had forgotten; but now conjectures arose in his mind. He gazed closely at the Valopian. But Antonio's face expresed only attention.

"Look here, Antonio," he said suddenly. "You

don't want it generally known that you are in Valopia, do you? Though who you really are," he added, "I haven't the least idea."

"I have your promise, senor." The Valopian's eyes narrowed, his voice betrayed anxiety.

"It shall be kept. But, Antonio, confidence for confidence. We don't want it known, generally or otherwise, that we are friends of Senor Hampton. None knew of our visit yesterday except you and Senor Hampton's servants. They will not tell."

"Neither will I, senor," said Antonio, answering the implied question.

"We shall not be seen there again," persisted Frank. "And the fact that we visited yesterday, that we are friends, nobody must know."

"It shall be as you say, senor. You can trust me." Antonio spoke in a tone that carried conviction.

Frank breathed more easily, feeling within the assurance that Antonio would be as good as his word. And seeing that the matter was closed for the time being, Antonio retreated to the kitchen to bring in the dessert.

Not until he had departed did Bob, who had sat silent throughout, venture to speak. Then the big fellow wiped his forehead, which was beaded with perspiration.

"Whew," he ejaculated, "I forgot that Tony knew where we went yesterday, and also that we had talked to him about Jack. Think he'll keep his promise?"

Frank glanced toward the door through which the Valopian had vanished, before replying.

"Yes, I'm sure he will," he said. "I don't know what makes me feel so certain. Call it intuition, if you will. Anyhow, I know he won't squeal. But I wish I knew more about him. There's some mystery there. D'you know, I believe the only lie he told us was in claiming to be a professional servant As a mater of fact, I'm willing to go anything that he's a gentleman."

Antonio returning at that moment, the conversation was dropped. Shortly thereafter, the two left to stroll in the Plaza, where twilight was beginning to deepen. They had dined at the unusual hour of four of the afternoon, combining for this occasion both lunch and dinner, the reason being that they had gone without luncheon in their hurry to get settled.

The Plaza at this hour was practically deserted. Valopia, following its noonday siesta, comes forth in mid-afternoon for an hour to sit at the sidewalk tables of the Cafe de Madrid and the Gran Centrale. But it had now sauntered home to dinner, and would not return to this common social ground for two or three hours. In companionable silence, Frank and Bob swung along that side of the Plaza opposite Jack's house, and it was not until they were abreast of the Presidential Palace that, having passed the little park in the middle of the Plaza, where the band later would be ensconced, they were able to see Jack's

door. Simultaneously, both stopped with sharp exclamations on their lips.

A considerable troop of horsemen were gathered before Jack's door.

"He has returned," was Bob's first remark.

But at that moment, a man, heavily-mustached, in riding clothes instead of uniform, placed himself at the head of the troop. The sun had dropped behind the western rampart, casting a long shadow over the Plaza, forerunner of twilight and darkness. The sunset had not yet come, and the sky was still filled with light, so that the figures of the cavalcade stood out plain to see. As Bob and Frank, rooted to the sidewalk before the Presidential Palace, gazed across the Plaza, they saw two other figures in civilian attire range up beside the first, just as the uniformed horsemen fell into military formation, with swords at salute.

Then the cavalcade, with a great ringing of iron-shod hooves on the cobbles, struck westward toward the outlet to the suburbs.

"Great Scott, the Dictator, I'll bet my last dollar," said Bob, relaxing his stare.

Frank, however, continued to peer toward the vanishing figures, and it was a long moment before he replied.

"Yes. And those other two were our fellow passengers to Valopia. Bob, this looks bad."

"Huh." Big Bob scratched his head, then took a step or two toward the curb.

"Let's go over and see Rafaela," he proposed.

Frank clutched him by an arm, and dragged him into step on the sidewalk.

"Suicidal," he breathed. "Don't look back. There's a sentry in front of the Palace who has been watching us fixedly. We can't call on Rafaela now, without tipping off our friendship. Come on, we'll continue our stroll and circle the Plaza. That'll bring us past Jack's place, and perhaps Rafaela may be out on the balcony."

With difficulty Frank managed to keep Bob's pace down to a saunter. Their eyes scanned the high wall of the courtyard, the iron-grilled windows, and the balcony of their friend's home, as they approached. Suddenly, Frank gripped his companion's arm, and whispered low and tensely: "The balcony." But when Bob looked, the flutter of white which had caught Frank's gaze was gone. Instead, Rafaela's face showed fleetingly between bowed shutters at the long French window, finger on lips, and when they would have stopped, her hand motioned them on.

They strolled on slowly, until Tomaso's voice sounded low behind them, with:

"Where can I await you, Senor?"

CHAPTER VIII

ON THE ROAD TO SAN ANDRES

THE storm clouds, as Bob described the dangers hovering over Jack, had not broken. On the contrary, when Captain Miranda and his score of mounted troopers arrived at Jack's mansion the morning following the visit of Bob and Frank, there was nothing in his bearing or deportment to indicate that Jack was other than a favored friend of the Dictator to whom a guard had been assigned in troubled times.

"There's Miranda," said Jack to Rafaela, as a great clattering was heard in the street, followed by a rap on the courtyard gate, which Tomaso hastened tremulously to open. The two young people stood in the patio, where Jack, preparations for departure completed, was saying farewell. In the courtyard his horse Victor, ready saddled, had been heard for some moments pawing the cobbles. "There's Miranda," said Jack. "Now to see whether there have been any overnight developments at El Miraflores."

He spoke lightly, for he did not want to worry his young wife, unduly; nevertheless, Rafaela knew with unerring instinct that Jack was anxious re-

garding the future, and she, too, experienced a tremor of fear, despite her resolute bearing. Suppose the German conspirators should have worked on Don Pedro to such an extent that instead of coming to accompany Jack to San Andres, Captain Miranda was here to arrest and throw him into prison!

These anxieties were soon set at rest. Miranda, young, handsome, dressed in cavalry uniform, advanced alone into the patio, hat in hand and a merry smile on his face. Life to him was a song. Little cared he who was in power, so long as whoever was uppermost provided him with a horse and an income, a sword by his side and a soldier's coat on his back. He served the Dictator for pay, and so long as that was good, so long as it provided him the wherewithal for gambling when off duty and the right to make light love where fancy pleased, he would serve to the best of his ability. He liked the young American, Senor Hampton, and admired his beautiful wife. Indeed, Miranda liked Jack so well that he had even stretched a point the day previous and warned him of danger ahead in the interview with Don Pedro. He was glad now that his orders were merely to accompany Jack to San Andres and bring him and all his equipment back to the Dictator's palace; glad because he had feared that he would receive an order to arrest.

"Now I know the day is so bright," he said, bowing his sleek dark head low over Rafaela's hand. And raising his piercing eyes, he glanced at her

boldly and added: "It is because you have come outdoors."

Rafaela shrugged her shoulders and laughed lightly. What to a young woman less accustomed to the gallantries of the South would have been an embarrassing compliment, to her meant nothing more than a customary greeting. Besides, she knew the captain.

"It is good for the gallant to practise his pretty speeches on old married women," said she. "They come the easier, then, to the young things."

"Oh, but I say—" protested Captain Miranda, laughing. "Old married woman, indeed." And he put a world of scorn into the disclaimer. "But, come," said he, turning to Jack, "since your wife will have none of my protestations, shall we to horse? 'Tis a long ride to San Andres, and the day will be hot. It is best to start as soon as possible so that we may accomplish the journey before the afternoon heat wilts both us and our horses."

Jack nodded, but made no comment; and all three strolled toward the courtyard. Captain Miranda considerately took the lead, and behind his back Jack snatched a farewell kiss. Then he and the captain sprang to saddle and rode out to where the escort waited in the Plaza, surrounded by a ring of curious market folk who yet kept a respectful distance. Then away they rode toward the mountains, with a melodious ring of iron-shod hoofs on the cobbles. As they turned from the Plaza, Jack looked back. Rafaela had fled indoors and to the

balcony, and now waved to him above the heads of the crowd.

"In faith, Senor Hampton," said Miranda, who rode beside him and had caught that backward glance; "it is devilish hard to leave a charming bride upon dull business. Not," he added, "that this is like to prove so dull, after all."

With startled interest, Jack put aside regrets at departure and turned to his companion. "You mean?" he asked quickly.

"Merely that we may have a brush with the rebels. They are said to be in force near San Andres, although not yet in the town."

This was all that Jack could get from the soldier for the time being, so after a question or two which elicited only non-committal replies, he desisted. Thereafter, they rode in silence, with the troop clattering behind them. The road at first passed among suburban villas, almost hidden amid luxuriant fronded palms and glowing red poinsettias, to emerge presently in the orange groves of the foothills. Soon, these, too, were put behind, and the road wound up and up amid the mountains, at every turn revealing some more glorious view of the plains and the city below and the blue sea beyond.

Where they paused at length, high up the steep, to breathe their horses, Jack waited until sure that he was out of ear shot of any trooper, then laid a hand on Captain Miranda's arm. The latter, leaning against a tree, lighted cigarette between his lips and eyes upon the distant prospect, turned his

head slightly. In a low voice Jack hurriedly said:

"I want to thank you. That warning yesterday, you know."

"Oh, that." Miranda flicked the ash of his cigarette carelessly aside. "It was nothing. Merely a salute to a worthy antagonist, Senor."

"Nothing?" Jack smiled. "It was sufficient to put me on my guard, so that—"

"Ah, but you were magnificent. Such acting as you faced the great man. But, Senor—" Captain Miranda stiffened, and his voice grew sterner. "Make no mistake. For you I have the greatest admiration. Your conduct yesterday was impressive. This much I can say, and within bounds I can be of help. But, remember, I am a soldier, loyal to duty. I am not a man with friends, but merely, I repeat, a soldier. I obey orders."

There was a moment's silence, then Jack said: "I understand. And your orders are?"

"Merely that I shall escort you safely to San Andres, and bring you safely thence to El Miraflores, with all your equipment now at your experimental station there."

Captain Miranda inclined his head a trifle, as if making a bow, and his eyes stared, inscrutably, into Jack's.

"I understand," said Jack, who already had formed a pretty good estimate of Captain Miranda's character, and who found all that had been said merely in keeping with what he had suspected. He looked away.

This man was not an enemy, as the Germans were enemies. He would not work actively to bring harm to Jack. Indeed, if it were within his power to do so without harming himself, as yesterday, he would warn him of an ill intended. But he could not by any stretch of the imagination be considered a friend. He was a man of that sort familiar enough at the French court in the time of the Valois kings but since largely non-existent—a professional soldier, who once he accepted pay remained true to his employer, no matter how scoundrelly the latter might prove to be. Thus, although Captain Miranda might not be at all in sympathy with the Dictator and his designs, he would serve him punctiliously.

A question rose irristibly to Jack's lips, and he voiced it.

"Then you have no orders to arrest me?"

The soldier did not even betray surprise.

"My orders are merely such as I have told you," he said coolly. Then, grinding his cigarette into the dust with a boot heel, and turning toward the horses, he said: "Come, Senor, we have dallied long enough."

They mounted silently and again set out along the mountain road. It was not the same road that led to El Miraflores. That was well paved and maintained. This, at first when near the town, in fair condition, now rapidly degenerated. There were great holes here and there, it narrowed down until two could not ride abreast without brushing the

crowding undergrowth, and the forest drew close.

That Captain Miranda was an efficient commander soon became evident, for after their halt, he disposed his forces as if in enemy country. No longer did he and Jack ride ahead, with the troop clattering behind. Two men were sent a hundred yards in the lead, two others followed fifty yards behind them. Then came Jack and Captain Miranda, riding knee to knee. Behind, riding two and two, came the troop.

The Captain gave terse orders that there should be no loud talking in the ranks, and that every man should ride with sword loose in scabbard and revolver in holster, and with his eyes constantly searching the woods and the mountain-side above. This much Jack heard, but what was said to the scouts sent ahead he did not overhear. When Captain Miranda took his place beside him and they got under way, Jack cast him an inquiring glance.

"Rebels?" he asked.

Captain Miranda shrugged. "Perhaps," said he. "Besides, the guards of the Dictator are not loved."

Then he fell silent, and Jack with his own thoughts to occupy him made no attempts at conversation. So they rode, the silence scarcely broken; and if any who meant ill to the little troop lay under cover, they failed to make themselves known. At the end of several hours, the road began gradually to descend, and presently came out on a level, high up on the side of a narrow valley tucked away amid the mountains. Far below ran a mountain stream;

and flung across it, in the middle of the valley, were the scattered, straw-thatched houses of a little town, with to one side an ancient stone tower from the roof of which rose an anachronism in the midst of this mediæval scene.

They drew rein and Captain Miranda pointed.

"What is that?"

"My aerial," said Jack. "See, there beyond, is a tall lone tree, to which the other end of my wire is fastened."

"But must we pack up that steel turret on the old stone tower?" asked the Captain, dismayed. "I was not told about that?"

"It can be dismounted and packed into comparatively small compass," said Jack, amused. "But you need not worry. We can leave it behind, if necessary. It is not essential."

Although it lacked still an hour of noon, the heat was oppressive; and when they drew rein in the valley below, Jack for one was glad that the journey had been accomplished. Captain Miranda looked as spruce as at the moment of starting, but the troopers showed signs of fatigue. They halted in a grassy meadow surrounding the old stone tower, and at a word from the officer the soldiers flung themselves from their horses with relief. The animals were led to water, and in a trice the little meadow took on the appearance of an encampment.

The nearest houses of the town lay some fifty yards ahead, and in their shadow could be seen assembled a motely group of women, children and

men staring half-fearfully toward the invaders. Jack glanced and glanced again, ere making out a familiar figure in the assemblage. Then he lifted up his voice in a shout of:

"Jose, Jose. Come hither, amigo. 'Tis I, come back to visit thee. Come, Jose, no harm is intended."

At this assurance, an old man detached himself from the huddled group and advanced along the track that crossed the meadow, passing near the old stone tower. Jack and his companion watched him curiously. He was a man bent almost double with age, supporting his steps with a huge staff. His feet were bare, ragged pantaloons clothed his thin legs, while the balance of his raiment consisted of a shawl twisted about his shoulders and descending to below his waist, which undoubtedly had once been bright but was now so faded that the original colors were indistinguishable. A huge bell-crowned sombrero of straw, broken at the peak, crowned his head, ragged gray locks of hair showing beneath. His face was leathery, burnt black by the sun, and incredibly wrinkled. Sparse white whiskers stuck out on his cheeks like tufts of wool which had escaped the clippers on a shorn lamb. But despite his age, as he drew nearer, eyes undimmed and piercing could be seen beneath the brim of his headgear.

"My caretaker," whispered Jack, in an aside, then he advanced a few steps to greet the old man.

"And how goes it with thee, Jose, since last I saw thee?" he called, while still some yards dis-

tant, adding: "Everything in the tower is as my assistant left it, I hope? You have seen to it that nobody has entered to meddle?"

"Enter? Enter?" Jose was now up with him. "Ah, Senor, you cannot imagine how fearful these people are. They think you work magic within the tower. See how they cower back. They will not even put foot on the meadow at night, and scarcely dare to cross this path by day, for I have spread word that there are devils within. You see, Senor, it was the best way to care for your property. But —" and lowering his voice to a whisper and speaking rapidly, he added—"what a misfortune that you come with these soldiers."

CHAPTER IX.

JOSE MAKES A REVELATION

"MISFORTUNE? That I am accompanied by soldiers? What do you mean, Jose?" asked Jack, in surprise, but keeping his voice discreetly low, so the words would not be overheard by Captain Miranda who was busy giving orders to a trooper regarding the placing of guards over the horses.

Careful commander that he was, the officer was taking no chances of a surprise raid so near to enemy country.

Jose's piercing eyes shifted with uneasy suspicion toward Captain Miranda, then back again to Jack's face. His gaze lowered. He was quite evidently engaged in an inner struggle. Why, Jack had not the least idea. The truth was, however, that Jose had spoken hastily and was now beginning to regret. Indeed, he was looking for a way in which to avoid the necessity of explaining himself, and would have welcomed the diversion of Captain Miranda's approach, for in that case it was unlikely that Jack would press him for an explanation.

No such diversion offering, however, he felt called upon to say something, so wetting his lips and look-

ing away he added: "Ah, Senor, these soldiers, they are not favorites of the people. I think it is bad you come with them, because then the people will not—will not—" Jose was at a loss; by a valiant effort, he rallied, and managed to conclude: "they will not like you."

Jack laughed abruptly. "Jose, you are not telling me the truth. But here comes Captain Miranda. Enough of this for now. At the first opportunity, we will talk apart again."

The work of disassembling the radio equipment in the tower required several hours; and Jack soon discovered that both here and in packing his apparatus for transportation on mule back to El Miraflores, the aid of the troopers was worse than useless. The clumsy-fingered fellows were willing enough; so, too, were Captain Miranda and Jose. But anything their inexpert hands touched was in such imminent danger of being smashed beyond all possibility of repair that Jack begged them all to desist and to leave him alone with Jose. To this they were glad enough to consent, for after the simple noonday meal the soldiers, being true Valopians, yearned for a siesta in the shade of the trees beside the mountain stream without.

For a time Captain Miranda stayed behind, displaying a mild interest in radio and in the "Radio-Vision" experimental apparatus, which Jack did his best to satisfy. But although he spoke in one-syllable terms, the Valopian's ignorance of everything

appertaining to the subject was so absymal that by mutual consent the attempt to improve his education was abandoned. Then Captain Miranda also wandered away.

Jack turned at once to Jose.

"Now I want an explanation."

"Senor, I do not know what you mean."

The old fellow looked as stupid as an ox. But Jack was not to be deluded.

"You said it was unfortunate that I had come with the soldiers."

"Ah, yes, Senor, because I want my friends to like you."

Jack made a movement of impatience; the look with which he favored Jose above the top of a travelling case beside which he knelt while stowing away apparatus, was eloquent of contempt.

"And then, too, it reflects on me," added Jose, in a tone of injury.

"What reflects on you and in what way?" demanded Jack, in a tone of stupefaction.

Jose shook his head mournfully, the ancient straw sombrero, which he had failed to remove, treatening to topple off at the movement.

"For a long time they saw you winding downward on the mountain road. My master comes escorted by men of the Dictator's own bodyguard. And I had told them—"

"You had told them? Whom?"

Jose continued in bland ignoring of Jack's bewildered questions.

"Senor," he asked, squarely, pursuing his own train of thought, "how does it happen that you are accompanied by these soldiers?"

So that was it, thought Jack, whose mind had been busy revolving these apparently jumbled statements in search of a clue; Jose believed him in league with the Dictator. And now he recalled earlier encounters with the old fellow, leading him to believe that Jose's heart was with the discontented of Valopia.

"Why," said Jack. "I am practically a prisoner."

"A prisoner?" Jose appeared incredulous. "These soldiers, they come and go as you say. There is no guard set over you."

"Nevertheless, the Dictator fears that my station here at San Andres is merely a blind. He charges me with using this place to communicate with the rebels, not to conduct my experiments. So I have been sent here under escort to pack up my equipment and return with it to El Miraflores."

"To the palace?" Jose exhibited lively interest.

"Yes," continued Jack, covertly regarding the old Valopian to observe the effect of his words. "I am to conduct all further experiments under the Dictator's supervision. I do not like this. It is putting my head into a trap."

At these words, Jose got abruptly to his feet and strode to a window where he stationed himself with

his back toward Jack. Through the latter's brain in the ensuing silence raced a bewildering succession of thoughts. Who was Jose, this old man who looked like a scarecrow, a peasant, but whose speech was polished and whose attitude was utterly devoid of subservience? And why had he, himself, taken Jose into his confidence to such an extent? It was true that a half-formed thought regarding Jose was running through his head, and that what he had said had been uttered on the spur of the moment, for the purpose of sounding the other out. But had he not been foolish thus to place himself in a way of speaking in Jose's hands?

Before he could come to any conclusion, Jose turned away from the window and regained his side. Jack still knelt on the floor, his hands busy with packing his apparatus, but his thoughts otherwise occupied. A brown hand rested on his shoulders and he looked up to find his companion regarding him with a glance of understanding.

"My son," said Jose, speaking rapidly. "I see how it is. You are in trouble. When you arrived with the Dictator's own bodyguard, I misunderstood. It seemed to me that some plans which I had been turning over in my mind were about to miscarry. And, in truth, they cannot be put into effect now, if you are to take away your station. I will be frank, as you have been frank. I am of the Patriots, and I had intended to ask you to help us. In what way, you are asking yourself, is it not so? Well, then,

by using your station to enable us to keep in touch with our comrades in the capital.

"Now," he went on, "that cannot be. There are in the woods surrounding San Andres many Patriots. At a word from me, at a signal from yonder window, they would close in and capture Captain Miranda and his soldiers. But that would not help. You would then have to stay here, whereas to maintain communication with our friends at the capital you should be there. Besides, this would leave your wife, who I must tell you made a fine impression on me that first day you rode hither, with her by your side—it would leave her in the Dictator's power. Nor, I take it, can you leave your equipment here, instructing us in its use, so that later you can communicate with me from the capital, because Captain Miranda is under orders to bring it back to El Miraflores with you.

"No, it is too bad," he added, "that my fine planning has fallen through. It would have facilitated our advance on the capital, it would have brought us into constant close contact with our brethren there. Nevertheless, we shall do what is possible in ordinary ways, and our blows will be struck just the same. Only, with your aid, it would have been hastened."

For a moment he paused, while his brow grew dark. Jack still kneeling was like a man turned to stone. He could only regard this scarecrow apparition, uttering these bewildering statements, with stupefaction.

"And now, my son," Jose resumed, "let me tell you not to fear the Dictator. His days are numbered. If he makes matters too harsh for you, however, before the end comes for him, get word to me in some manner of your plight. It will be strange if I cannot come to your aid. You see," he added, a mist dimming his eyes, "old Jose is fond of thee. I once had a son who—"

"Oh, sir," cried Jack, at last gaining his feet and finding voice, "you don't know how I appreciate your confidence. Be sure that it shall not be betrayed. And as for your offer to come to my aid if necessary, why, that is mighty fine of you. Only I shan't have anything much to fear. You see, I haven't told you all. The Dictator charges me with doing the very thing you now propose to me to do. And if I were free to do it, by the way, I can't honestly say that I would give you the help you ask. You see, this isn't my fight, and I would have no business imperilling my company's property or its rights in my invention, by taking part in a civil war. But Don Pedro doesn't really believe I am working against him. That is a cloak to conceal his real motives, which are to obtain my invention and hand it over to foreign radio interests who have bribed him to do so."

Jose looked away and sighed, a figure of dignity despite his odd raiment.

"I hear what you say, but it does not matter now. Only remember that I shall be ready to give help,

if you call. You see I once had a son, young, brilliant, who fell under this evil man's displeasure. We were landowners, wealthy, and Don Pedro coveted our property. There was a fight, and I fell. My son fled, thinking me slain. I—I—" He passed a hand across his brow. "Some poor people carried me to the woods and nursed me back to health, and here I have stayed, among these simple people who know me only as old Jose. But I have not been idle," he added grimly, a glance roving toward the window that looked out upon the woods.

Then again his voice softened. "Enriquez de Tovar was my son. He fled the country, and I heard that he had gone to your land, to your great city of New York. Indeed, perhaps, you have seen him there. No?" he said at Jack's shake of the head. "Ah, well, if he lives he shall come back when Don Pedro is overthrown, and then we shall be reunited. Senor," he added, simply, "you remind me of him when he was young like you. But, ssh, busy thyself. There are feet on the stairs."

Then, with a quick pressure of the hand, he turned away, as the door opened and Captain Miranda entered the room.

CHAPTER X.

FIRST BLOOD

THE return journey was made in silence. Captain Miranda told Jack briefly that one of his men had been told by a trembling cringing peon who came secretively, seeking to curry favor, that the rebels were in force nearby. The troop, therefore, rode as rapidly as the nature of the ground permitted, with no conversation in the ranks, and every man on the alert. Jack's radio equipment was strapped to the backs of two pack mules in the center of the little column, but fortunately these animals did not prove obstreperous.

When at length a branch road on the right, leading to El Miraflores, was reached without incident, all breathed more freely. Captain Miranda and his men well knew the hatred of the people toward them, and shuddered to think of what would be their fate if captured.

As they approached the summer palace of the Dictator, well along in the afternon, Jack at length broke the silence which hung between him and Captain Miranda by voicing a question that had been long in his thoughts.

"I suppose," he said, with studied carelessness, "that we part at El Miraflores, after leaving my equipment?"

"I know nothing about that."

"You see, I am eager to get home before nightfall," continued Jack. "The road to Valopia is a steep descent, and none of the best. And there will be no moon tonight."

Captain Miranda nodded non-committally. He was aware of what lay behind Jack's remarks, he knew the latter was trying to discover whether he was to be compelled to stay at El Miraflores. But he had no solution to offer. His orders had been to accompany Jack to San Andres, and bring him back to the palace with his radio equipment. What would happen thereafter was a matter that lay on the knees of the gods—or, rather, in the hands of Don Pedro.

That Don Pedro did not really suspect Jack of being in league with the Valopian rebels, but was playing a deeper game, was apparent to the soldier. Therefore, it was quite possible that, on arriving at El Miraflores, new orders leading to Jack's detention might be issued. As to that, Captain Miranda could not say. But he liked Jack, and he decided to relieve his anxiety as much as possible by letting him know that so far he himself had no indication that Jack would be held at the palace.

"Thanks, Captain," said Jack, when thus informed.

His heart was lighter, for he had been worried,

not on his own account, but for fear of the effect upon Rafaela should he fail to return.

At the palace, Jack's equipment was carried into a room adjoining the Dictator's private office, by order of a secretary. Don Pedro was not in evidence. For this Jack was devoutly thankful, and he hurried his departure lest the Dictator appear and order his detention before he could get away. That no orders for keeping him at the palace had been given the secretary, was apparent.

Leaping on Victor, after the last box had been stowed away, Jack rode off with a lighter heart than he had borne for many hours. Perhaps, after all, he thought, as he took the road to the city, his fears were too highly colored and no drastic steps were to be taken against him. He did not see the puzzled looks which passed between Captain Miranda and the secretary, as he cantered down the avenue, nor hear the soldier's question:

"Is this, then, all that will be done?"

To which the secretary, a slender Latin with waxen wisps of mustache, spreading out his hands in a deprecatory gesture, replied:

"I don't know."

"And Don Pedro?"

"He left before noon for the city."

"With?" A significant glance.

"Both," replied the secretary laconically.

"Hm." The soldier turned away, but at the first step he halted and said over his shoulder: "Perhaps,

His Excellency did not anticipate we would return so soon."

The secretary again spread out his hands, accompanying the gesture by a shrug of his shoulders.

"Ah, well," said Captain Miranda, "if he wanted the Senor Hampton held, he should have left orders. It was not my fault that we arrived before he returns, the rebels were too close to San Andres to make lingering wise. However, I have the feeling that shortly there will be the devil to pay. Unless," he added, as an afterthought, "they meet on the road, and Don Pedro brings him back."

This time, Captain Miranda departed without turning back, making his way to the stables to see that his men were attending properly to their horses.

Jack, on putting the palace behind him, rode at a brisk pace. And Victor, despite the miles of mountain roads already covered, was homeward bound and showed no inclination to tarry.

A mile or two beyond the palace was a bridge across a narrow but steep gully, at the bottom of which ran a brawling mountain stream. Here Jack turned to the left, and, dismounting, knelt to drink, with Victor dropping his head to the crystal water downstream. As he again stood upright, Jack heard the tramp of horses on the road above, coming from the direction of the city, and a moment later the sound of voices.

Almost without conscious thought, but acting instinctively, he jerked on Victor's reins and darted

unlerneath the bridge with the horse at his heels. He felt assured that he had not been seen, and listened with strained attention to the approaching sounds. None travelled by this road unless bound for El Miraflores. Therefore, it must undoubtedly be the Dictator and his escort who approached, homeward bound. So Jack reasoned; and having no desire to be halted and questioned, and, possibly, ordered back to El Miraflores, he was thankful to have found cover in time to escape observation.

If only now the troop passed on, without stopping as had he, to water their horses! In that event it was almost certain that he would be discovered, although it was just possible that all might descend on the same side of the bridge, in which case he might be able to take cover unseen in the brush downstream. He listened with beating heart, as the sounds made by a considerable cavalcade grew lounder. Already iron-shod feet were drumming on the planks overhead, the echoes reverberating like heavy drum beats in the hollow vault where he stood tense with one arm flung over Victor's neck.

Then suddenly a horse neighed on the road, and Victor's head went up with a jerk to give reply. But Jack gripped him by the nostrils and held on, speaking soothingly in a low voice, until the danger was past.

The last horseman trotted over the bridge, the cavalcade went on without drawing rein. And Jack

leaned heavily against Victor's shoulder, surprised to find himself momentarily so weak.

Dazedly, he drew hand across forehead as the last heavy hoof-beat died away, and the forest calm, broken only by the sound of the stream flowing over rocks, once more closed in. What made him feel so fearful? Time was when this occurrence would have been taken as one of the ordinary chances of fortune. But now his heart was heavy with dread, and his thoughts flew instinctively to his home. Had anything happened to Rafaela during his absence? This thought he dismissed as soon as it came. No need to worry, for he would soon arrive home and hear the tale of an uneventful day. But as he reached the road, and set off homeward in the deepening shadows, he found himself unable to throw off that reavy foreboding which clutched his heart like a hand. Poor Jack, who felt disgusted with himself and wondered vainly why the light heart of other days and other ventures had fled. He did not realize that with marriage had come responsibilities and ties which put him in a class apart from Bob and Frank.

Night, which comes swiftly in the tropics, closed in as Jack reached the outskirts of the city; and it was in a darkness lighted only by a few feeble street lanterns that he made his way toward the Plaza. Then, just as he was about to turn into the great square, a figure rose out of the darkness and laid hand on his rein. He drew back his fist, prepared

to strike, for footpads were not unknown, even though the Dictator's heavy-handed police were more efficient than is customary in Latin-America.

The next instant his heart gave a bound as he recognized Frank at the same time as the latter's voice reached his ears.

"Turn back, Jack. Don't go to your house. The police are there," said Frank, low-voiced, his face a gray blur at Jack's knee.

"But—but—"

"Hold tight, I'll get up behind you."

The next instant Frank was seated astride Victor, and clasping Jack about the waist.

"Now turn down some side street and ride to the Pedrarias place. We rented it today."

"But, Rafaela! I must go to her."

"You can do that later," said Frank firmly. "She's all right. I vouch for that. But before you go and put yourself in the hands of the enemy, we must have a talk. Bob and I have taken turns waiting for you here, because we felt sure that if you came home at all this would be the way. Though how," he added, "you managed to escape being detained at El Miraflores—is that the right name?—well, how you managed to escape arrest, I don't know."

Obedient to instructions, Jack had turned the unwilling Victor, who knew that this was not the way to the stable, up a side street. But, unwilling as his horse to leave home behind, he was still protesting.

"But I tell you Rafaela is safe. Worried about

you, of course, but safe. We're not under suspicion, so it was easy enough to get a message to her through Tomaso whom I met on the street, and to hear from her in return. We've got to have a council of war before they lock you up, so there's nothing else for it but this. Is this our courtyard? Right, I see it is. Well, in you come."

And leaping down from his cramped seat on Victor's withers, Frank opened the gate and his bewildered, anxious friend rode in.

Bob appeared, and the two friends hurried Jack indoors and placed food before him, while Antonio led Victor to the long-disused stable and gave him a feed. The food, the lights, the faces and near presence of his old friends, all conspired to raise Jack's spirits; and, with his anxiety regarding Rafaela's safety allayed, he was soon in brighter mood.

The story of the day's events was soon told, with Frank acting as spokesman and Bob interjecting occasional remarks.

"So, then," concluded Frank, "we told Tomaso to await us at the Pedrarias place, and when we arrived, found this note from Rafaela." He handed a tiny, hastily scrawled missive to Jack, whose eyes devoured it several times before he looked up.

It told of a visit by the Dictator, who was very suave, and who said he had come to bring some of Jack's radio equipment to El Miraflores. There had been no mention, wrote Rafaela, of arresting

Jack, and instead she had been assured that he would be home on the morrow. Hastily penned, it left much to be told. All that Tomaso could add was that guards, four in number, had been left behind in the courtyard, and that Professor Bonatelli had been taken away by the Dictator. This latter information was given in response to a direct question regarding the timorous scientist's whereabouts.

"I thought, of course, that you'd be held prisoner," said Bob. "But Frank had a hunch you'd be returning. So he sent me post haste to lay in wait for you, while he stayed behind to have a talk with our man Antonio. A queer fish, Antonio; but more about him later. Then he came to relive me, and the next I knew here you come riding double."

Jack's gaze was troubled. "Fellows, I confess that I don't know what to do." He paused a moment. "Here's what happened today," he said; and launched into a brief account of his own adventures. "Now," he added, "so far as I can see there's only one thing for me to do, and that's to go home and let them arrest me, if that's what they intend to do. Useless to hide out. Even if they failed to find me, all my radio equipment, everything, would be confiscated. Besides, there's my wife. I couldn't leave her alone to face indignities and—"

He got up and took a turn or two about the dining room, pausing finally in front of Frank.

"Somehow," he said, "I can't think. I'm so wor-

ried about Rafaela. Have you any ideas? If you have, out with them, before I go."

Frank gazed thoughtfully at the tablecloth on which he was drawing aimless designs with the tines of a fork.

"They took Bonatelli with them," he said.

"Yes, I know. What of it?"

"I don't trust him. He's a weak man. They'll try to frighten him into revealing your secrets, into giving away your 'Radio-Vision' plans."

"I suppose so," said Jack. "But he doesn't know much."

"He knows about the existence of the Synchronizer, doesn't he?"

"Yes, of course."

"Well, when he tells them about it and they come to search for it, what then?"

"They won't find it, that's all."

"I suppose so." Frank was thoughtful. "But he does know that it was there, in your laboratory, all right enough, the other night when you and I entered. And it wasn't there afterwards."

Jack sat down with a groan.

CHAPTER XI.

ANTONIO TAKES A HAND

"Now I've let you in for it," said Jack. "Of course, Bonatelli will put them on your track. He'll tell of your visit to my house, and of the subsequent disappearance of the Synchronizer. Oh, why did I ever consent to your scheme? I've just brought trouble on you. I told you I couldn't think."

And he buried his face in his hands.

His companions both uttered gruff remonstrances, which, if an outsider had believed, would have led him to think that Jack's friends considered him an utter idiot, who should not be permitted at large.

"You're right," said Jack, desperately, "and the only thing to do now is to take the Synchronizer home with me, so that you won't be drawn into this."

Frank laughed. "Jack, old fellow," he said, "you need a nurse. What, admit yourself licked! Give these German spies just what they want! Over my dead body, that's all."

"And over mine, too," said Bob. "As well," he added, jumping up, "as over the corpses of a couple of dozen Dictators." And he began flexing

his arms, and making ferocious swings at an imaginary enemy.

"Well, then, what shall we do?"

"You'll have to go home, of course," said Frank, speaking slowly, and again prodding the tablecloth with his fork in the absent-minded manner of one thinking deeply. "You want to be by Rafaela's side, and you want to keep an eye on the Dictator and these two Germans, so as to find out what kind of game they're playing. That goes without saying, and—I don't think they will do you any physical harm. Remember, the Dictator would have to answer to our government at some time.

"As to us," he added, "I think the best thing for us to do is to act boldly. Bob and I will ride out to El Miraflores tomorrow and present ourselves to this Dictator as emissaries of American business seeking to establish a branch house in Valopia. In the interview we can tell him casually that we knew you slightly in New York and so paid you a call on our arrival, inasmuch as you were our only acquaintance here. We can talk big about the money behind us, speak casually of friends at Washington —Senator Broadman, you know, is my uncle. And even though Bonatelli may make some statement or other which throws suspicion on us, why, the Dictator will be slower than otherwise to move against us."

Bob nodded. "And there's that letter your uncle gave us, too."

"I was coming to that," said Frank, answering Jack's look of inquiry.

"My uncle, the Senator, gave us a letter of introduction to the American Minister here," he said. "He didn't know the Minister was homeward bound on account of illness. That ought to make quite an impression on the Dictator."

"But he'll get you eventually. We're pretty far from Washington, and with no official representative of our country here to speak for us," said Jack. "These Germans undoubtedly already have paid Don Pedro a big sum of money to get him to squeeze my 'Radio-Vision' secrets from me, and have promised him more. It's money that counts with him."

"Let it count," said Frank imperturbably. "Just as long as we gain a little time."

There was a peculiar ring in his voice, which caused Jack to examine him with re-aroused interest.

"You've got a plan in mind that you're keeping back, Frank, haven't you?"

"Oh, a half-formed idea, that's all," said Frank. "No use to discuss it now. You've got enough worries on your mind. Run along home, and get arrested. Keep an eye on Bonatelli, and communicate with us through Rafaela or in whatever way you can. But, listen, old thing," he added, getting up and throwing an arm over Jack's shoulders, "just bear in mind that we've all been in tougher situations than this, and managed to turn them to

our own advantage. We'll do the same again."

When Jack's figure, mounted on Victor, melted away into the darkness of the back street, Bob closed the gate of the courtyard and faced his companion.

"Out with it," he said. "Jack's worried sick, and naturally; he's got a wife to think of. But I haven't, and you can't put me off. Now what's that plan?"

"Let's talk inside." And Frank led the way indoors, to where Antonio was clearing the dining table.

"Antonio, we'll want to be alone for a few minutes," said Frank. "But stay within call. I shall want to talk to you presently."

Not a sign of surprise out of the Valopian. He bowed slightly and retired. But Bob gazed with a puzzled expression at his companion.

"What you want with Tony?" he asked. Then brightening: "Is he part of your plan?"

"Perhaps," said Frank, dropping into a chair. And resting his elbows on the table, he cradled his chin in his hands. "Draw up, Bob, Jack's in a hole, and it's up to us to do what we can to help him before we tumble in ourselves and our freedom of movement becomes strictly limited."

"You think it's going to be that way?"

"Think? I know it."

"But you told Jack—"

"That we'd pay the Dictator a call tomorrow, and bluff him into keeping hands off of us? We'll

do that all right in order to gain time. But of itself, it won't be enough."

"I'm listening. Shoot."

"All right. Here's what I've been turning over in the old bean." And for five minutes Frank talked rapidly in a low voice, while Bob leaned closer and closer, his eyes growing brighter every moment with excitement and delight.

At length, when Frank ceased speaking, Bob thumped him on the back so hard that his nose brushed the table.

"You've hit it," he cried jubilantly. "We'll fix Mr. Dictator yet."

And in his exuberance of spirits, he plucked his lighter weight chum out of the chair, tossed him over a shoulder, and thus encumbered began to prance like a war-dancing African savage. Hanging head down, Frank thumped vigorously on his captor's back, and what between yelling and laughter they set up a very fair imitation of bedlam. The door was opened and Antonio stood, alarmed, on the threshold.

"Come in, come in," cried Bob. "We want to talk to you." And depositing Frank in a chair, he flung himself into another, chuckling.

Antonio hestiated, but Bob left no doubt of his intentions. "Sit down, sit down," he boomed, motioning the Valopian to another chair with an impatient wave of the hand. "Think we've gone crazy, hey?" Bob chuckled. "Well, maybe we have. And we want to talk to you about it."

The newcomer was truly puzzled. But his face was grave, expressionless, a perfect mask. What could be coming now? He had considered these two young men easy to read. They had not told him that their friend, the Senor Hampton, was in disfavor with the Dictator, but he had surmised as much. When dismissed from the room a short time before, he had said to Manuel in the kitchen: "They are in trouble, and wish to talk it over, poor youths." Yet here they were, tussling with each other like playful young dogs, and chuckling as if at some huge joke. He could not understand. Crazy Americanos!

"Tony." Bob straightened in his chair, and turned sidewise, leaning on the table, a position which brought him face to face with the other who sat in a chair adjoining.

"Well, sir?"

They were speaking in English, of which the Valopian had an excellent command. Bob made use of the familiar term which he had applied to Antonio from the first day of their association. Perhaps, coming from another, the Valopian who was a man of strange dignity despite his employment, would have resented this familiarity. But who could take offense at Bob?

"Do you want to palaver, or shall I?" Bob shot the question at Frank, who leaned forward across the table, opposite them.

"Go on."

"All right, then, here goes Tony," Bob said,

"we're in trouble and we need your help. We're in trouble with the boss of this country, or, rather our friend is. We think you can give us the help we need, because we believe you have no love for Don Pedro's administration. Are we right or wrong?"

Antonio's eyes flashed momentarily, then again his face became impassive.

"Don Pedro is all powerful," said he.

Bob's good humor drained away, his lip began to curl. "Huh," he snorted, explosively, "I thought you had—"

But before he could finish whatever slighting remark was on the tip of his tongue, Frank's hand outflung across the table and gripping him by an arm arrested the words. Frank spoke quickly, an anxious expression on his face. But what was that in Antonio's eyes, a twinkle of amusement, rather than resentment?

"Easy, Bob, easy," warned Frank.

"All right, you talk. You can do it better than I." And Bob gazed gloomily at the table cloth.

"If you fear the Dictator's power, it is no more than to be expected," said Frank. "For as you say, he is all powerful—here. But his power doesn't run far, I've been given to understand. At least, there are many people in the country who are discontented. We're going to place ourselves in your hands, Antonio, to some extent, by telling you that we don't like Don Pedro. Now we're not politicians. We don't know a thing about the af-

fairs of this country, and, frankly, we don't much care. But our friend, Mr. Hampton, is down here working on a wonderful development of radio, and we have reason to believe that some enemies who want to gain possession of his secrets have bribed Don Pedro to imprison him and take away his plans and equipment. I'm telling you this much so you'll understand what follows."

"You're telling an awful lot, old thing," Bob interrupted abruptly.

"Senor, you need not fear," said Antonio in a quiet tone. "Whether I am to help you or not, your secret is safe with me. I am not likely to carry the word to Don Pedro."

"We knew that, Antonio, or we'd never have spoken like this," Frank assured him.

"So?" Antonio's brows went up in a quizzical expression, and he gazed at Bob.

The latter flushed. "Sorry I flared up, Tony," he said heartily. "I didn't understand. Go on, Frank."

"Yes, Senor, you were about to say?" Antonio looked questioningly at Frank.

"Just this. Hampton is in a hole. Don Pedro has seized his radio equipment. There were soldiers waiting at his home to arrest him. But there was nothing for him to do, after our talk here a while ago, except to go home and let them seize him, or at least make him a virtual prisoner. You see, he couldn't afford to hide, for two reasons: one, he wants to keep an eye on Don Pedro

and these business rivals who are trying to obtain his invention; and the other, his wife."

"Couldn't afford to leave her unprotected and open to indignities," put in Bob.

Antonio nodded, lips tight, face exceedingly grave.

"So it's up to us to do our bit," continued Frank. "Suspicion won't be long in pointing at us." And he explained tersely that Professor Bonatelli, now a prisoner in the Dictator's power, was the weak link that might give away. At the end he paused, remained silent a moment, wrapped in thought, then said abruptly:

"This is what I am coming to. Out at San Andres is a friend of Hampton's whom we just learned about from him tonight. Do you know where San Andres is, Antonio, and would you guide one of us there?"

"Yes, Senor, I know San Andres. And who is the man you wish to find?"

"His name is Jose. A queer sort of old fellow, a leader of a rebel band. So you see the man who guides us can't very well be any ordinary man, but must be someone who is—well, disaffected toward the Dictator."

"So you think I am a rebel?"

"Well, you know what you told me yourself in New York," said Frank. "I didn't think you were exactly fond of Don Pedro's government."

Antonio seemed not to have heard. After his question, his head drooped and he sat sunk in a

brown study. His lips moved, but the sound made was barely audible. "San Andres? Jose?" Then, shaking off his abstraction, he sat upright. "My young friend," he said cryptically, "if you wish to find rebels only, you need not go so far afield. But we cannot produce here Joses who are friends of your friend. So I shall go with you."

In their jubilation at this neither Bob nor Frank noticed two slips. Antonio had dropped into the address of an equal; and he had intimated an acquaintance with rebels in the city.

"Bully boy," cried Bob, thumping Antonio on the back. "We light out at daybreak tomorrow."

"You both go?"

"No, just you and me. Frank here goes to play poker with Don Pedro because he can bluff better than I."

CHAPTER XII.

THE BLOW FALLS

BUT the best laid plans of mice and men "gang aft agley." Frank and Bob had occasion to ponder on that truism frequently during the course of the ensuing week. It began before dawn the next morning, when Bob awoke with a raging headache and feeling of nausea that would not down. Frank did his best to allay his comrade's torments with such remedies as he could compass at the moment, but dawn finding poor Bob in the grip of a fever, Antonio went forth, returning with a Valopian physician who looked grave on seeing Bob's flushed face.

Bed, a darkened room, quiet and certain medicines, were Dr. Lopez's prescription.

"How bad is he, Doctor?" inquired Frank anxiously, as they stood outside the sick room after his comrade had fallen into sleep at last as the result of certain powders.

"A touch of tropical fever," said the stout little physician, dark eyes inscrutable but kindly above his little pointed black beard. "We'll have him up and around in a few days."

More than a week elapsed, however, before Bob

was on his feet again. In the meantime, pursuant to the physician's instructions that his mind must be kept free of all worries, Frank did his best to dissemble anxiety over Jack's troubles, the matter to which the sick man's thoughts kept turning time and again.

Frank was far from feeling, however, the cheerfulness which he displayed before the invalid. Matters were not going well. Bob's visit under Antonio's guidance to Jose, the rebel leader of San Andres, of course could not be made. Nor could Frank and Antonio make the journey instead. Both were needed at the sick man's side, where, indeed, Antonio, with his knowledge of tropical fever, was a tower of strength.

Neither could Frank in the first few days of his comrade's illness, when the poor lad tossed and babbled in delirium, stir from his side long enough to journey out to El Miraflores and present himself to Don Pedro. This, however, he deemed of such urgency that at the first opportunity, which came on the third day when the fever was broken and Bob rested quietly, he undertook. Laying first on Antonio many an injunction regarding the care of the sick man, he stole away without informing the latter of his contemplated errand.

Frank presented himself before the Dictator in his own character as a young American business man, eager to establish a branch house in Valopia. Bob's illness he seized upon as his excuse for not

calling earlier; and in this connection, during the course of the interview, he dropped the name of the attendant physician, in the belief that it would be wise to have this verifiable fact of Bob's illness established should the names of himself and his comrade be brought under suspicion, as he felt certain Don Pedro would have a secretary make inquiries of Dr. Lopez.

But the interview did nothing to clear up his growing anxiety regarding Jack. With the latter he had been in communication the past two days through notes passed by Antonio and Jack's servant, Tomaso. On his part, he had minimized Bob's illness, so as not to add to Jack's worries. From Jack's hurriedly penned missives he had learned that no further hostile steps had been taken against him, and that, on the contrary, he was still at his home and had not yet been summoned to El Miraflores.

In this latter fact, however, lay cause for anxiety, in Frank's opinion. That Jack was concealing the seriousness of the situation, so as not to add to his worries, was his firm belief. Surely, the Dictator had not taken all Jack's radio equipment, without intending to go further? He had carried off Bonatelli to his summer palace, and was keeping him there. What could that mean, if not that Bonatelli was being grilled for the purpose of wringing Jack's secrets from him?

Presently Bonatelli would weaken. He would be-

tray the fact that the most important part of Jack's "Radio-Vision" apparatus, the Synchronizer, was missing from the material seized at San Andres and at Jack's town house. And if he did not at the same time reveal that Frank and Bob had been at Jack's home the night of the Synchronizer's disappearance, and thus direct inquiry their way, yet when a further search failed to disclose the Synchronizer's whereabouts, he would be more than likely to divulge that information.

It was with a beating heart, therefore, that Frank went to El Miraflores, for all this had been passing through his mind. Indeed, it required the display of considerable moral courage to seek the interview with the Dictator. But the latter seemed to accept the young American's statements; at least, he did not question them. And when Frank referred casually to having visited Frank Hampton the first day of his arrival, because the latter was a New York acquaintance, no apparent note was taken of his statement.

When, toward the end of the interview, Frank displayed Senator Broadman's letter introducing him to the American Minister, and mentioned that the Senator was a relative, he was disappointed at the effect produced. He had hoped that Don Pedro would be visibly impressed, but had yet to learn that Don Pedro never betrayed his feelings except for a purpose.

In the end Frank came away without having

added to his knowledge, and without having seen Bonatelli or glimpsed the two Germans. He reasoned, and rightly, as events were to prove, that these two shipboard acquaintances were living at El Miraflores, and looked for them, but in vain.

There was this comfort to be derived from the interview, however, he thought as he rode back to town, that Jack, whom he had expected to see carried away to El Miraflores two days before, was still free, although under the surveillance of men stationed in his house by the Dictator. Furthermore, suspicion had not yet apparently pointed to him and Bob, as aiding Jack in keeping his radio invention out of the enemy's grasp. Indeed, on the other hand, Don Pedro seemed to have accepted him at face value, for he had promised every assistance would be given in the carrying out of Frank's proposed business plans.

The return journey was uneventful, and, after putting up his horse, for Antonio was not on hand in the courtyard, Frank entered the house. Failing to find his man in the living rooms, he mounted the open stairway and put foot on the upper landing just as the Valopian emerged from Bob's bedroom and closed the door noiselessly behind him. Frank's brows went up in the question that his lips barely framed, and Antonio nodded smiling and then, as he drew nearer, whispered: "He sleeps."

Satisfying himself after a whispered question or two that the day during his absence had passed un-

eventfully, Frank hastened away for a bath and a change of clothes. Twilight had come as he descended to the patio where Antonio reported. Bob had slept, eaten, scolded Dr. Lopez, and suffered himself to be read to by Antonio. He had demanded the reason for Frank's absence, and when Antonio had temporized by saying that the absent youth was merely strolling through the town, he had scoffed.

"He said, Senor," commented Antonio, "that it was useless for me to lie to him as he knew you had gone to El Miraflores. 'Bring him to me when he returns,' he said, 'or I'll make you get a new face.' "

They laughed together in perfect understanding. Antonio's deepening fondness for the two youths was obvious.

"Well, so long as he suspects," said Frank, "I guess I better go and see him. What did Dr. Lopez say he could eat? Fix us up something and bring it to his room."

Antonio bowed and withdrew, and Frank again mounted the stairs, but with lightened heart. If Dr. Lopez professed amazement at Bob's rapid recovery, the old boy must be coming along well. Cautiously, he opened the door, expecting to find his comrade asleep. But, wham! a pillow hurled from across the room smote him full in the face and sent him back against the door frame. It was followed by another which he managed to sidestep, then he saw Bob sitting upright in the middle of the great ebony four-poster and chuckling triumphantly.

"Thought you'd fool me, hey?" Bob hailed. "Well, when you didn't show up I suspected where you were, and Tony confirmed me. Come on in now and tell me how you made out with his Nibs."

"You big bully," said Frank, advancing with a grin. "If that's the way you're going to treat company that comes to relieve the tedium of the sick room, why I'm liable not to come again."

"Huh." Bob sank back, with a little sigh of relief that did not escape his visitor. Evidently, his display of force had tired him. "You won't have any sick friend to sit up with much longer. I'm getting up tomorrow."

"Yes you are."

"The medico said I could."

Frank was only half convinced. "Yes, he probably said you could if you wanted to kill yourself." He looked at Bob narrowly.

"You're half right," Bob admitted, with a twinkle. "Just the same he said I could get up for a while, and would be out in another day or two."

"Well, nobody wants you up more than I," said Frank. "There's a lot to be done, and it needs the pair of us to do it." Thereupon he launched into a description of his visit to Don Pedro. And after Bob had pumped him dry of details, he needs must know just how matters stood with Jack according to the latest information. So Frank talked on, relating the events of the past few days which had been withheld from Bob while he was in the grip of the

fever, telling of the communication opened via Antonio and Tomaso, and giving his deductions regarding the situation.

Antonio entered the room quietly as twilight deepened, to light the candles in the great seven-pronged candelabra standing on an ancient ebony dresser, the polished top of which reflected back the lights in winking points of flame. Then, finding the two comrades engrossed in conversation, he slipped noiselessly away, and it was not for another half hour that he returned bearing a tray.

"I've a big notion to get right up out of this bed and knock your heads together," grumbled Bob, looking with disfavor on the bowl of broth and the one lone chicken wing which had been served him, and with longing eyes at the heaping portion supplied his companion. "Is this all the Doc said I could have, Tony?"

The latter's lips twitched with amusement, but he merely nodded gravely in reply.

"Well," said Bob, "you can just march out of this room, then, Frank, and eat somewhere else." But as Frank moved to comply, he put out a restraining hand. "Have a heart, boy, have a heart," he pleaded. "Eat a whole blamed poultry yard, if you want to, but don't go 'way and leave me alone."

They ate without speaking for a while, each busy with his own thoughts. Bob's improved condition, Frank's reception by the Dictator, the fact that no further hostile steps had been taken against Jack,

alike conspired to lighten the burden of anxiety under which they had suffered in recent days. But suddenly this companionable silence was interrupted by the return of Antonio with a face exceedingly grave. One look, and Frank jumped up from his chair, while Bob, sitting propped up among pillows, leaned forward startled.

"What's the matter now?" asked Frank sharply.

"There is a man below with bad news."

"Tomaso?"

"No, Senor."

"Why, who else could it be?" asked Frank in bewilderment. "Nobody knows us. And— Say," he broke off, suddenly, advancing a step toward the other, "you don't mean the Dictator has sent for us?"

"No, Senor. He is none of the Dictator's hirelings. He is one of my men."

"One of your men?" cried Bob from the bed. "This is getting thick."

"Yes, one whom I set to watch the Senor Hampton's house."

"One of your men," cried Bob again. But Frank's face went white under the tan, and he put out a hand to stay Bob. "Then Jack has been—"

"Arrested, Senor," said Antonio. "The Dictator's men have just taken him to El Miraflores."

CHAPTER XIII.

ANTONIO REVEALS HIMSELF IN A NEW LIGHT

At the candle-lighted table in the patio, Rafaela and Jack were sitting over a late dinner, conversing in low tones. Their talk was of the two topics uppermost in their minds: Bob's illness and the conspiracy against Jack. Of the former, they entertained no doubt regarding the outcome. Frank's careful minimizing of the gravity of the case, in the notes surreptitiously exchanged, inclined them to the comforting belief that the big New Yorker soon would be on his feet again. Their chief anxiety, therefore, was as to what the Dictator would do, and how to combat him.

From the courtyard came the rattle of dice on the cobbles, and the sound of voices tense with excitement. Jack got up and went to the gate where he stood peering into the darkness. Rafaela saw a dim shape rise up on the other side of the gate and address him. Then he returned and resumed his seat.

"Gambling by lantern light," he said tersely.

"And the man who spoke to you, was he Tomaso?"

"No. The sergeant. Keeping his eye on me."

"Oh." There was a world of meaning in the exclamation. Since his return from San Andres, Jack had been aware of the sergeant's constant surveillance. The servants could come and go as they pleased, apparently unnoticed; and it was thus that notes had been smuggled out through Tomaso and others received through the same channel. But let Jack approach any exit, and there was the sergeant, polite enough, but watchful.

"I wonder—" began Jack, then stopped.

"What?" Rafaela leaned toward him, expectant.

"Oh, just this: no orders for my arrest, no explanation from the sergeant as to why he and his men are stationed here, except that he has been so ordered and I must put them up; and myself allowed considerable freedom. Is Don Pedro giving me an opportunity to try to get away, to go somewhere? Does he figure that I have friends about whom he is unaware, and that if he can find them he will discover my secret? Is he waiting for me to betray myself, so that his men can track me?"

"I don't know," he said, low-voiced, as if talking to himself. "I don't know. Everything is so dark. I wish we were well out of it. And there's Bonatelli, too. Why was he taken to El Miraflores, while I am permitted to stay here? Are they sweating him, shooting questions at him, frightening him, to make him reveal my plans? He doesn't know everything; he couldn't describe my inven-

tions so that they could be duplicated. He couldn't build my apparatus himself, least of all the Synchronizer. But," he added, looking up, "he might easily throw suspicion on Bob and Frank. That's what I'm most worried about. And then I'd be to blame. Oh, why did I ever let Frank persuade me? Why did I let him take that stuff to his house?"

With elbows propped on the table, he dropped his head into his hands, and sat staring moodily at the cloth. The gate in the high wall separating the patio from the courtyard clicked, and a familiar voice greeted them in liquid Spanish. The silent couple glanced up astonished and a bit startled; then Jack got slowly to his feet as Captain Miranda, for he it was, stepped into the glow cast by the candles which sent their flames upward, straight and unwavering, in the windless night.

A gallant figure looked the guardsman in his tight-fitting light blue breeches, hip-high black boots of soft Moroccan leather, and the dark blue coat that sat so well on his full-formed chest and splendid shoulders. His black-plumed hat swept the ground as, with hand on sword hilt, he bowed low before Rafaela. Truly, Don Pedro dressed his guardsmen like singers in an opera, she thought fleetingly. Then her eyes turned grave as her thoughts reverted quickly to the hovering danger.

"And to what do we owe the honor of your visit?" she inquired the moment formal greetings had been exchanged. Her heart beat high but by an effort she kept her voice calm.

Jack said nothing but his gaze was troubled. The guardsman who really liked the young couple, and detested his mission, answered lightly.

"Ah," said he, "His Excellency, Don Pedro, begs that the Senor Hampton will honor him with his presence. He desires to talk with the Senor Hampton about his inventions."

Rafaela's eyes swiftly sought Jack's and he saw the trepidation in them. He, too, saw plainly enough the iron hand in the glove. This meant arrest, no less. But he must be brave for Rafaela's sake; besides, there was not much to fear, matters were bound to right themselves. So he tried to reassure himself, while at the same time smiling a response to his wife's unspoken appeal. Then he turned to Captain Miranda.

"Will you be seated, while I pack a valise? I presume I am to stay overnight?"

Miranda's reply was a non-committal nod.

"Juan will serve coffee," said Jack, reaching for the bell. But Rafaela stayed his hand.

"No, I shall serve our guest myself."

"But"—Jack gazed, surprised—"will you not help me prepare?"

He stood beside her, and she looked up quickly, imploring: "I shall be up before you go," she whispered, hurriedly. "Please."

Picqued, and even mystified as to why Rafaela should elect to stay behind, Jack took his departure. But if Captain Miranda also felt any mystification, he was not left long in doubt. While Jack's steps

still rang on the tiled walk, Rafaela leaning toward him across the table, came directly to the point.

"Does this mean my husband's arrest?"

"Madame." He spread out his hands in deprecation. "I but convey an invitation."

"Ah, an invitation! And if my husband refuse to accept it?"

"But he will not be so—so impolite."

"Yet if he should? If he should refuse to go? What then?"

"Madame, I cannot contemplate the contingency."

Rafaela felt baffled. She tried a new tack.

"Ah, I see how it is; merely a simple call. That is why you come alone."

Captain Miranda's eyebrows went up. "Alone? Oh, no, Senora. The Senor Hampton is a distinguished guest. He must have an escort. My men await me in the Plaza."

Rafaela was young, she was worried on Jack's account. At this she felt her worst fears confirmed. She was dangerously close to tears. But by an effort she kept them back, and getting to her feet, like an angry goddess, she cried scornfully:

"And you serve such a man!"

The guardsman, despite all his suavity, was feeling distinctly uncomfortable. This woman was young, beautiful. If she should burst into tears, plead that he let her husband escape, what should he say? What do? At this moment Jack's voice, calling from the house, interrupted. Rafaela, without a word of excuse or apology, turned and sped

away. Captain Miranda put a hand to his forehead and was surprised at bringing it away wet with perspiration. He wished himself well out of this.

But he was not yet through the ordeal. Ere she had taken ten steps, Rafaela turned on her heel and came flying back.

"And the guards, Captain?" she demanded. "We have done nothing evil. We are American citizens. Yet your master subjects us to this indignity. Do you take them with you?"

"Those are not my orders."

"What! I, I alone, after my husband departs in your charge, I must submit to the surveillance of these men? I must feed them, house them in my stables? Oh, this is too much."

"Senora," said the young guardsman, "they shall not intrude, nor place any indignity on you. I shall answer for that, because I shall have a word with the sergeant ere I depart. But stay they must."

"And, why? Why? To protect us from harm?" Rafaela's voice grew acrid with scorn. "Whom have we to fear except their master?"

Again Jack's voice, more insistent than before, called through the darkness; and Rafaela answered over her shoulder. Then, turning to the guardsman, by a lightning quick change, she became soft and pleading.

"Ah, at least tell me why these men are here?"

She was too much for a susceptible man to resist, one, moreover, whose character was not of the

same stripe as his employer's, and who more than suspected that these young people were the innocent victims of some dark plot.

"This much I'll tell you, Senora," he said, low-voiced and hurried, "and then, by all the Saints you must promise to ask me no more. It has something to do with a part of your husband's invention which cannot be found."

"Oh, and they think it is hidden here, buried, perhaps?"

"I have said all I shall say, and more than I should have revealed."

The guardsman looked away, his lips tight-pressed.

"Thank you," breathed Rafaela, and fled.

The last vestige of reluctance on the part of Frank and Bob toward taking Antonio into their councils was swept away by the revelation that, without consulting them, he had stationed a man to keep watch on developments at Jack's house. If any further indication was needed of Antonio's devotion to their interest, regardless of the fact that these ran counter to the wishes of his country's ruler, this act supplied it. But while assuring them of the man's good will toward them and Jack, his surprising action deepend still more the mystery surrounding him. The two youths regarded each other in speechless amazement.

Frank who was the first to recover the power

of speech motioned Antonio to approach, and the latter advanced to Bob's bedside.

"Look here," said Frank, "we're mighty grateful to you. You know that. But you've got me puzzled, Antonio, and I can see you've got Bob too bewildered to talk. What's this about one of 'your men' watching Jack's house? What do you mean by 'your men,' anyway? Isn't it about time that you took us into your confidence a bit. We've been perfectly frank with you, you know."

"Senor," said Antonio, "it is very simple. I am a Valopian patriot, who was forced to flee into exile several years ago. Now I have returned, changed almost beyond recognition. A few old friends have rallied to me; Manuel, who cooks for us, is one. They were servants of mine in the old days; and though they are simple men, they are true."

Bob chuckled amid his pillows. "I knew a guy who never stuck his thumbs in the soup couldn't be a born waiter, Tony."

The beginnings of a smile played about the corners of the Valopian's mouth, but he continued fixedly to look at Frank. He was obviously awaiting a serious reaction to his statement, and as obviously looked for it to come from the more thoughtful of his two employers.

That Frank already had passed beyond the point of surprise, and, digesting the Valopian's information, was proceeding to see how it fitted into the scheme of things, was evidenced by his remark:

"Of course, I can't blame you for not telling us before. You must make sure of your man before you confide in him to such an extent. But, then, when I spoke to you about this man, Jose, at San Andres, this friend of Jack's who leads a rebel band, why, doubtless you knew him?" He gazed inquiringly at Antonio.

The Valopian shook his head. "No. Senor. It was near San Andres that my estates lay. But, Jose; it is a common enough name. Without the family name, I cannot tell. Perhaps I looked thoughtful when you spoke of visiting a man named Jose at San Andres, because that was the seat of my estate and—Jose was my father's name."

"Was?"

"Ah, Senor, he was slain by the Dictator's men. I escaped. Do you wonder that I have vowed vengeance?" And he seemed like a man transformed, his eyes flashing fire. But only for a moment, then again he sank into an inscrutable reserve. Yet Frank knew the fire was not out beneath.

Impulsively the young American laid a hand on his companion's arm, while Bob, who had exclaimed with anger, raised himself on an elbow to reach over and seize the Valopian by the hand.

Only for a moment or two, however, was Frank silent. His thoughts were racing on, and again he indicated their trend by his remark:

"From the first moment that Jack told us of his

predicament, I had the feeling that we'd have to look to the rebels for help." He was speaking to Bob. The latter nodded. "Antonio—if that is your name—"

"No, Senor. But it will do until the time comes —when I can tell my real name to this robber, this murderer." Antonio paused, and when he resumed his voice was once more passionless. "If you will continue to call me Antonio, and let me serve you as before, that will be my best cloak."

"All right with us, if it is with you, Tony," said Bob. "But, say," he added, boyishly, "I don't mean to be fresh when I call you Tony, you know."

The older man unbent his sombre gravity to smile. "My friend," he said, "I like it."

"Well, then we're all set to go." And big Bob sank back with a sigh that was near a groan.

That sigh meant that he was weary, but for once Frank ignored his chum's comfort; if, indeed, he heard.

"What I was going to say," he pursued, "was that, with Jack actually arrested, and no American authority to appeal to, we're up against it. I'm for deserting neutrality—"

"Sure, leave it flat on its back," interjected Bob, reviving.

"—and for appealing to the rebels for help," said Frank. "So, Antonio, maybe we won't have to go to San Andres to appeal to Jack's friend, Jose. Maybe you can put us in touch with the rebel

leaders here in the city. For I suppose they've got men here, haven't they?"

A twinkle came into Antonio's eyes.

"Senor," said he, "I am the rebel leader."

CHAPTER XIV.

IN WHICH MIGUEL MAKES HIS ENTRANCE

If Antonio had said, "I am the Dictator," the two young Americans could not have been more startled. They looked at him in profound amazement, and the sick youth even again raised himself on his elbow, only to fall back to the pillows almost at once and press a weary hand to his forehead. Frank saw the gesture, and the spell laid upon him was broken. Filled with compunction at his neglect of his comrade, he bent down and laid a hand on Bob's forehead.

"Hot," said he, shaking his head. "You'll have a fever again, if we have any more excitement. Here, take this."

Lifting a bottle from the table, he uncorked it, poured a few drops of the contents into a spoon, and pressed this to the other's lips. Then he uncorked a carafe of water, turned the cool liquid into a glass, and held it while Bob drank.

"Now," said he, "you're going to turn over and go to sleep. I ought to be kicked for exhausting you."

Antonio who stood by throughout, exhibiting

anxiety in his gaze, nodded approval, but Bob essayed a protest.

"Great Scott," he grumbled, "you can't go away and leave me like this. Why, everything is up in the air. Here we discover a probable benefactor in Tony, and then you want to go and drag him away before I can talk it over with you."

But Frank, taking the Valopian by an arm propelled him toward the door, lifting the candelabra and carrying it with him. As the light retreated, a sigh came from the bed.

"You stony-hearted villain," said Bob. "Just wait till I get on my feet."

Then the door was closed from the outside, cutting off his voice. In less than five minutes Bob was asleep.

In the library, whither they retired, Antonio sank into a chair, where he sat with arms folded and brooding eyes gazing into space. But Frank's thoughts were in a turmoil, he was too agitated to compose himself quickly, and he moved up and down the room, stopping here and there before the bookcases to stare with unseeing eyes at their contents.

His movements presently brought him before the seated figure, and, having pondered and come to certain conclusions, he paused and broke into speech.

"You are a strange man," he said. "You have suffered much, that is apparent. Some time, if you will do me the honor to tell it, I would like to

hear your story. But not now. Now there is only one thing uppermost in my thoughts. My friend, Jack Hampton, is in a mighty bad fix. Bob and I are his only available friends, and, with Bob sick, it is up to me to help him. Let us come to the point, then. I feel that you have the power to help, Antonio. But have you the inclination?"

"You will observe," said Antonio, with the ghost of a smile playing about his mobile lips, "that already I have shown some slight willingness in that direction."

Frank acknowledged this little thrust with a nod of the head, but there was no answering smile. His gaze was troubled, his face drawn with worry.

"You've been fine," he said.. "But will you go further? Will you help me to rescue Jack?"

"But, yes, as soon as possible."

"I mean now—right away—"

And Frank, too stirred to remain in one position, took a step or two aside, then returned.

Antonio appeared about to protest. Then he contented himself with the question:

"What do you mean?"

"Why, you say you're the rebel leader. Can't you get together a bunch of your men and rescue Jack from this Don Pedro? I tell you, I feel as if some deadly peril hung over him. This sudden arrest and all! Oh, hang it, Antonio, we've just got to get him free, if I have to attack El Miraflores single-handed."

Antonio met the imploring gaze, and shook his head sadly.

"It is not to be done so easily, my young friend," he said. "I have not the strength yet to do that."

Frank sank into a chair, hands thrust into pockets, legs outstretched, eyes cast down; and a look almost of despair settled on his features.

"But, Antonio," he said, presently, "can't you see what this means? This Don Pedro is a barbarous brute. I've heard some pretty bad stories about the way he treats his enemies; and, as to that you know from experience, I suppose. He has Jack in his power, and how do I know what he'll do to him? Look here, Antonio, surely you've got men enough to manage a surprise attack?"

But his hopeful glance was answered only by a shake of the head.

"Why not? If you haven't men enough for that, how can you hope to succeed in your rebellion?"

"Senor, there have been discontented in Valopia ever since the Dictator seized power years ago. But they have been scattered, suspicious of each other, fearful of betrayal, and have not united. Now that I am here, they look to me as leader, and we are beginning slowly to work together. But all this takes time. You see," he explained patiently, "in my unhappy country the means of communication are not swift and up-to-date as in your great republic. And such as they are, Don Pedro controls them. Telegraph, telephone, radio—ah, these things you

have in your land but not we in Valopia. We rebels can communicate only through messengers, peasants, travelling long distances afoot or on mule back through the mountains. We do not even know each other some times. You see how it is, for I had not heard until you told me of this Jose at San Andres."

When first Antonio began his explanation Frank had looked downcast, but suddenly his eyes had brightened, and now, as the other ended, he burst into rapid speech.

"Look here. Why didn't I think of that before? I'll bet I can be of help. Oh"—laughing, with the quick rebound of youth, as he met the Valopian's puzzled glance— "you've said something about lack of communications that started me off on a new tack. It's this, Anotonio: Bob and I both know something about radio, as well as Jack, and maybe we can be of some use to you in making contact with other parts of the country, if that's what you want. I don't see just how; it'll require a little thinking over; but it can be done," he concluded confidently.

"I hope you are right," said the Valopian, but although he had brightened at Frank's assertion, there was a note of dubiety in his voice. "I know very little about these things," he added, "but won't you require equipment? And where can we get what you will need?"

Frank laughed. "Ah," said he, "then we did put something over on you."

Whereupon he told of the two cases of equipment smuggled in and hid in the patio the night before they took possession of the house, explaining that the next day during Antonio's absence and before Manuel's arrival, he and Bob had taken the equipment indoors and hid it in a deep closet behind emptied suitcases and traveling bags. In a final burst of confidence, he even confided that a portion of the hidden material constituted the key device of Jack Hampton's "Radio-Vision" invention, and that it was this which the Dictator and his fellow-conspirators, the German agents, were so desirous of obtaining

Then nothing would do but that Frank should launch into a lengthy explanation of the invention, its working and purposes, drawn thereto by the intelligent prodding questions which Antonio asked. When finally the latter consulted his watch, he exclaimed in surprise. It was near midnight.

"We understand each other now, at least," he said, getting up. "It has been good to have this talk which will assuredly lead to something. I repeat that it would be foolish to rescue your friend by force right now, even if it were possible to do so, for where could he go except into the wilds, while the Dictator continues to hold power? And his wife would then be left exposed to indignities, his invention destroyed. However, be assured I shall

do all in my power. And do not worry too much about him. Now I must bid you good-night, for I have an appointment in the lower quarter of the city to keep."

Before retiring, Fank stole soft-footed into Bob's room, and, shading a candle, bent above his couch. It pleased him to see that his friend slept sound and deep, and to discover, by gently laying a hand on the other's forehead, that the dryness of fever had departed and that a slight moisture lay at the roots of his hair. He himself believed that, with his head humming, sleep would be far away. But five minutes after throwing his weary body on the bed in an adjoining room, with the communicating door left ajar so that he might hear if Bob called, he, too yielded to slumber.

In the meantime, Antonio, wrapped in a cape-like coat of dark material, such as the Valopian men of fashion affected, was making his way by dark, forbidding alleys and byways to that quarter of the city, along the waterfront, where the dregs of the Caribbean congregate, as well as the honest but rough sailors and longshoremen. He slipped along like a moving shadow, avoiding street lights and occasional pedestrians while still in the better part of the city by the simple expedient of dodging into a convenient doorway or doubling a corner. At length he came into the slums, where the decorous and hushed quiet of the upper town was succeeded by occasional rude bursts of song, laughter or fur-

ious words coming from some wine shop with little glowing windows; where the narrow, vile, ill-lighted streets were filled with loitering groups talking loudly and where the Dictator's police were not to be feared because they dared not venture. There he struck out boldly and without concealment, and was soon before the side entrance of a wine shop at the mouth of an alley beyond which lay the sands and the waters of the harbor. A continuous murmur came from the lazy lapping of the tide, and in this place, so strangely quiet and apart, this was the only sound. Under the moonless sky, the waters gave off a sullen gleam, and in the murk this and the single yellow ray piercing through a hole in the shutter of an upper window formed the only illumination.

But without trepidation and as one knowing his way, Antonio inserted a key, opened the door of the side entrance and was swallowed up in the gloom. Once inside, despite the impenetrable gloom, he felt for the bottom step, then steadily mounted a stairway, opened a door at the top, stood framed a moment in a flood of light from within, then entered a large room.

At his entrance, three men who sat at one end of a long table, and who had been talking earnestly together, ceased their discussion and looked up. They did not appear startled, for evidently Antonio had been expected. But the talk had been heated, signs of it were apparent in each face; and one man thrusting back his chair got to his feet and strode to meet

the newcomer. He was of such prodigious girth that, despite a considerable height, he seemed squat; his face was round as a full moon, hairless except for grizzled mustaches that drooped at the corners of a wide gash of mouth; dark eyes bright but small resembled raisins in a pudding. As the rolling gait that proclaimed him sailor brought him close to Antonio, who had paused in his advance and was throwing his cloak, he poured out a welcome in a loud voice, but then hurriedly and in a whisper meant only for Antonio's ears breathed: "Do not reveal where you live, master."

Then once more resuming that jovial booming tone which had pierced the blast of hurricanes and on numerous occasions had kept trembling sailors from throwing themselves into the sea in an excess of storm-induced frenzy, he revolved slowly as if on a pivot and accompanied Antonio back toward the table, uttering reproaches for lateness.

Not by word or gesture did Antonio betray that he had received a muttered warning as he covered the distance intervening between himself and the two men who rose at his approach.

CHAPTER XV.

IN WHICH TREACHERY REARS ITS HEAD

"Be seated, senors," said Antonio simply, and he set the example by dropping into the chair at the end of the table which the huge man had vacated.

Obediently the others subsided into their seats, while the dispossessed man rolled rather than walked to a table along the nearer wall where he stood with back turned and elbow uplifted while the clink of glass on glass could be heard. In a trice he was back with a tray, bearing four glasses filled with a ruby liquid. When these had been passed, he said heartily: "To the Cause," then tossed his off at one great gulp. The others drank more slowly, and were still sipping as the host, for such he appeared to be, pulled forward a chair and sat down at Antonio's right shoulder.

There was a little silence while they drank, and over the top of his glass Antonio's eyes searched the faces of his companions. The man already described was Miguel Despardo, although it was seldom enough that anybody employed his family name. He had been a sailor in his day, a sea-rover in command of a little ship that plied in and

out of all the ports of Latin-America. If only one quarter of the stories current about his great strength and his shady transactions were to be believed, he was a Herculean picaroon of the first die. At length he had given up the sea and had retired from it—a matter of some twenty years—to run this wine shop and sailors' rooming house. Between him and Antonio was more than appeared on the surface.

The others, whose faces were picked out sharply under the glare of an over-hanging oil lamp concentrated downward by a tin reflector, were men of different stamp. One was the money-lender Feldman, whose Oriental origin was revealed in his features. His eyes, large, bright and piercing, returned Antonio's glance, undisturbed, impenetrable. The eyes of the other, a young man of twenty-five or thereabouts, were downcast. His was a handsome face, the brow lofty under a close-lying mass of dark curls, the features acquiline. Francisco de la Cruz was scion of a very ancient family of pure Castilian lineage, and showed it. If the mouth was thought too slack, it was not readily noticeable.

Antonio was first to break the silence, which had succeeded the toast, looking around on all three and addressing none in particular as he said:

"It seems I interrupted a heated discussion."

"Well may you say so. Well may you say so," boomed Miguel. "Two more Patriots were seized today—the planters Urbano and Pamplon. Have

you heard? We were talking about it when you arrived."

"Urbano and Pamplon seized? But they dissembled well, there was little enough reason to suspect them to being in the Cause." Antonio's brow was troubled. He looked questioningly from one to other of his companions.

Feldman elected to reply. "I heard of it from the Senor de la Cruz."

"Their estates adjoin ours. My father informed me." Francisco de la Cruz looked up with flushed face. "This is becoming unbearable." He jumped suddenly to his feet and took a disordered stride or two, then turning came to Antonio's side. "How long must we continue to live like cowards with this terror hanging over us?" he demanded.

A rumble started in Miguel's throat, but Antonio rested a quieting hand on a huge knee, and the volcano subsided.

"What do you mean?" he asked quietly.

"Mean, senor? Mean? Why, what can I mean, but this: You preach patience to us all, to Miguel who whips the waterfront into line, to Senor Feldman who holds many of our merchants in the hollow of his hand, and to me who do what I can among the hotheads of the old families."

The young man stood taut above Antonio, almost threatening in his attitude. The leader did not flinch, neither did he show any resentment. His eyes revealed nothing yet bored deep.

"Well, then, yes, I preach patience," he said

calmly. "It is a virtue. It is more than that these days, for it is likewise a necessity. What of it?"

"What of it? What of it?" Francisco was working himself into a nice rage. "Only this: that while we practise patience, this insatiable monster devours men. Unfortunately, they are our men. Every day, the Dictator arrests several of our foremost. Urbano and Pamplon make the tenth and eleventh to be seized. Soon the only Patriots left will be ourselves. And, strange as it may seem, Senor, I for one have no desire to be devoured."

He had been speaking with increasing rapidity and rage. Now he stopped a moment, both to recover breath and poise. When he resumed it was in a calmer tone, deeper and with an underlying significance.

"Senor, you see how it is quite clearly, I am sure. Before you came, we looked forward eagerly to your coming. 'He will make headway for us,' we said. 'He has a head on his shoulders for these things.' But since you came, what? Nothing but arrests. Almost as soon as men agree to join the Cause, they are arrested."

So bold and fiery was the young aristocrat's glance as he made this last statement that Miguel, uttering a hoarse growl in his throat, half rose from his chair. But Antonio restrained him with a touch. Although apparently not taking his glance from the face of the enraged young man standing above him, out of the tail of his eye he was aware of Feldman, silent, watchful, impenetrable.

"Is it that you are accusing me, Francisco?" he asked calmly.

"No, but, Senor—"

"Do you think it likely that I, I whose father lies in a nameless grave, would be in the pay of the creature who put him there? That I, whose vast estates have been stolen, would aid the thief who took them? Ah, Francisco, think a little of what you are saying!"

Miguel, rumbling in his barrel-like chest, nodded approval. Feldman alone appeared unmoved. As for young de la Cruz, he hung his head, half in shame, wholly in confusion. For a moment, it seemed as if he would appeal to Feldman; he made a slight movement as if to turn to him, but as then if seeing that immobile countenance no promise of either condemnation or support and, in fact, no promise of anything, he halted the gesture as soon as begun. This did not escape Antonio.

"Is that all you have to say, Francisco? I am waiting."

At these words, uttered in a severe yet not unkindly tone, the young man's lips parted once more. But no longer did his gaze meet that of his leader's.

"Senor," said he, doggedly, "you have asked some questions that, in truth, I cannot answer. It seems it would be insanity to suspect you. Yet since embarking in the Cause, I begin to suspect everybody, even sometimes myself."

"A bold move that," muttered Miguel, but so

low that nobody heard him, only his lips were seen to move. "If I were a rascal now, that is just what I would say."

Aloud he rumbled: "Come to the point, Senor de la Cruz. Tell our leader what you were saying when he entered."

Antonio turned toward the last speaker with a look of inquiry, but a gesture directed him to address himself to Francisco.

"I was saying, Senor, that we do not know where you live."

"That is true." Antonio's reply was imperturbable. Not even that close observer Feldman could see that he changed expression by so much as the flicker of a single muscle.

"Well, Senor, you have the advantage of us. We plot but we cannot hide. The Dictator knows where to find us. It was unfortunate for Urbano and Pamplon. It is unfortunate for us."

"And so you would have me put myself in the unfortunate class, and make my residence known to the Dictator's soldiers."

"No, no, Senor; only to your associates," said Francisco, obviously screwing up a flagging courage to the final effort. "As a guaranty of good faith, Senor," he added, the words coming in a rush.

Miguel like a watchdog who sees his master threatened would have sprung forward, but once more Antonio restrained him. For just a fleeting instant a little blaze of inner heat flared up in his eyes. When he spoke, however, it was in the same

calm and lofty tone which he had employed throughout this dialogue.

"Enough, Francisco. We have all been under a strain, and this strain will increase until the day when we may come out into the open and do what we can to restore freedom. As to my residence, it is only temporary, and I must beg you not to request me to reveal the location as it would only compromise the good people with whom I stay."

Although somewhat put out of countenance, Francisco seemed prepared to continue this debate, but now came a sudden interruption from Miguel. He had been about to boil over on several occasions, and had been restrained only by his leader. Now, however, he managed to gain his feet and, leaning forward across Antonio so close that the latter was compelled to crouch sideways to prevent being smothered by the huge mountain of a man, he thumped the table top with one ham-like fist and shook the other menacingly under Francisco's nose.

"And I say this baiting of the General has got to stop," boomed the inn-keeper, his little eyes as fiery as a cat's in the dark. "You have had your say, Senor de la Cruz, now I'll have mine. The General is a better man than any of us can ever hope to be. I and my water rats have faith in him. If he chooses to keep his residence a secret, that is his affair. What do you say, Feldman?"

The rich money lender, thus familiarly and abruptly addressed, spoke for the first time.

"I say so, too," he declared smoothly. "And

I am quite sure that the General will pardon the Senor de la Cruz's words. He knows that no evil is intended; that our young friend is carrying a heavy burden of worry, and that this has led him to speak a bit wildly."

Francisco's eyes met Feldman's directly. Then he looked away. "Yes, that is true," he said, at the same time passing a hand across his forehead, as if dazed.

"Say no more," advised Antonio, in a kindly tone. "And now let us take up our reports, to see how matters progress. The hour grows late."

"That is right," said Feldman, pulling his chair forward, as Francisco sank down beside him and Miguel, glowering, subsided across the table. "I am making some progress with the merchants. They are beginning to promise money. Since I have last seen you I have talked with—"

Thereupon began a stock-taking of recruits who would take up arms and of recruits who would pay others to take up arms, followed by a general discussion of conditions, which lasted a long time.

At the end, as was customary, Antonio went out by himself, followed at a brief interval by Francisco, who in turn was followed by Feldman. Each as he entered the outer darkness melted away into the night. Miguel alone was left. He accompanied Feldman to the street door, which he bolted. Then he went to another door, opening into a rubbish-filled alleyway, dark as a pocket, at the

back of the house, and when he unbarred and opened it a dark figure slid inside.

Without a word said, the two repaired to the upstairs room, where the newcomer threw aside his cloak and stood revealed as Antonio.

"Now we can talk," said Miguel. "So Francisco is the traitor?"

Antonio looked thoughtful. "My good friend, I do not know. But what would you say to a chance to look into the Dictator's office out at El Miraflores one of these days—at a time, say, when whoever it is works against us makes his appearance?"

"With all those Guardsmen in every room and corridor," scoffed the inn-keeper. "No, no, that would be a chance only to look into a dungeon and then to step inside and inspect it more closely."

Antonio continued as if the other had not replied.

"A chance not only to look into the Dictator's private office when our enemy calls, but to overhear everything that is said, Miguel?"

Pityingly Miguel shook his head. "Senor, are you well?" he asked, with clumsy sarcasm. And he touched his head.

"Oh, quite well, thank you, Miguel," declared Antonio, palpably enjoying his companion's mystification. Then he proceeded to intensify it. "You see, Miguel, first of all you and I shall sit down in this room. It will be dark. Then we shall take

up a mirror and gaze into it, and there we shall see the Dictator's office, Don Pedro at his desk, and this secret enemy of ours sitting opposite. Then we shall put something to our ears, and we shall continue to look into the mirror. And when we see the lips of these two people part in speech, at the very same instant we shall hear what they say. Every word shall come to us as clearly and distinctly as if we were in the same room with them."

"But, Senor—" And now, indeed, Miguel began in sober truth to ask himself whether his companion was not unaccountably touched in the head, as he euphemistically phrased the thought to himself. His eyes grew as large as it was possible for them to grow, and his jaw hung open.

"Listen, my friend," said Antonio. "All that I have visioned for you is going to happen. I have discovered a young inventor who has a marvelous machine which will do these things for us. He is in trouble with Don Pedro, and we shall help him and he shall help us. It came to me tonight, as I listened to Francisco. Sit down and let me tell you about it."

For a long time he talked, and when at length he came to an end Miguel was convinced. His face radiated joy, although, truth to tell, he understood no more about the mysterious "Radio-Vision" apparatus of which Antonio had been speaking, than at the beginning.

"And I think it is Francisco we shall see," he declared. "The traitor."

"Ah, Miguel," said Antonio cryptically, "we must discover how much money Francisco owes to Feldman."

CHAPTER XVI.

DON PEDRO IS PULLED TWO WAYS

On this same night, but at a somewhat earlier hour, Jack was closeted with Don Pedro in that private office at El Miraflores before the door of which Captain Miranda always stationed a responsible guardsman and where he himself took position on occasions of importance. This was such an occasion, so that, after seeing Jack into the Dictator's presence, when dismissed, he in turn dismissed the guard on duty in the anteroom and flung himself into a chair.

Closing the door behind him, Jack advanced into the middle of the room. The Dictator, who was seated at a huge flat-topped desk facing the door by which Jack entered, was attentively examining some papers spread before him and did not look up. "So that's your game," thought the young American. "Well, two can play at it as well as one." Whereupon he strolled to a side wall and turned his gaze upon some oil paintings hanging there, as if there was nothing else of moment to engage his attention. He even went so far as to place hand on hip and, cocking his head on one side, he would advance a step or two toward the canvasses, then fall back, just as the critic does in an art gallery.

None of this was lost upon the seated man. On

the contrary, it at first enraged him and then made him thoughtful. What manner of man was this young American, scarce out of his teens. There was about him that aura which brave men carry and which, without a word being said, has the power to strike terror into the hearts of cowards. And at bottom the Dictator was a coward.

Yet so long had he ruled despotically and with absolute power that it seemed impossible to believe this youth could thwart him now. Don Pedro was one of those gross men who put their trust in the material weapons of life and, having collected them all, feel that they are now immune. They forget that the moral weapons also can strike shrewd blows. He imagined that all he had to do was to apply threat and argument, and that then Jack would reveal the secret of his invention. A smile of satisfaction crossed his features as he thought of what a huge sum the two Germans would then pay for that secret.

At this point Don Pedro decided the game of indifference had been played long enough, so he called Jack's name. But Jack was enjoying the situation in a measure; the tremors which earlier he had experienced on his wife's account had been thrust into the background of his thoughts. In fact, slow though he was to anger, the Dictator's studied insolence on his entry had lighted in his breast a fire that was beginning to mount higher. Not until the other called a second time and louder did he

turn around, and then only slowly. He had been regarding the pictures without seeing them, for his thoughts had been turned inward and his plan of procedure was made. He would follow this good beginning toward enraging the Dictator by still further aggravating him. Perhaps, then, Don Pedro would become incautious and say things he now thought only of keeping secret.

"You called, Your Excellency?" said Jack, therefore, one hand still on hip, merely facing about and not advancing.

And he stared with mocking courtesy at the figure seated behind the desk on the opposite side of this great room. It was illumined softly yet penetratingly by hidden electric lights, for, although modernism might obtain nowhere else in this backward land, here, in this palace of luxury, built by money wrung from a groaning nation, was practically every comfort the ingenuity of man had devised.

Don Pedro started. The start was almost imperceptible. Yet by the flutter of an eyelid, the twitch of a muscle in that domineering face, Jack knew he had pinked his opponent.

"Advance and be seated. I wish to have a talk with you," said the Dictator in a controlled voice.

Jack crossed the floor, heart beating but courage high. He walked with a trace of a swagger that to the smoldering eyes watching his approach bespoke contempt more clearly than could speech have done.

With his handkerchief he flicked the seat of the chair indicated, as if removing dust, before seating himself.

Quietly he awaited his opponent's next move. Veiled eyes crossed glances over the top of the desk like the swords of duellists, fencing cautiously at first to feel each other's strength.

"I sent for you, Senor Hampton—"

Don Pedro got no further.

"At a very inopportune time, Your Excellency," interrupted Jack. "It is always an honor to be invited to visit you." He bowed slightly, a bow with so much mockery in it that the Dictator writhed inwardly. "But," he went on, "I was at dinner. And you know, sir, that one's dinner should never be put aside unfinished. I felt compelled, therefore, to ask your messenger to wait until I had concluded."

Don Pedro's gaze fell. A politician of no particular ancestry or breeding, he had risen to the supreme power in Valopia through his ability to play upon the weaknesses of others, to traffic in their knavery. He felt now that he was in the presence of a superior person; and this inspired in him mingled feelings of rage, caution, helplessness and fear. But he had been raised in a stern school, his face did not betray what was going on within.

"I am sorry to have caused you inconvenience, Senor Hampton," he said in a stifled tone, as if these words of courtesy, almost of apology, were torn from him by force.

"It is of no acount now," said Jack lightly. "I had intended to visit El Miraflores tomorrow, and you but anticipated me."

"You were coming here tomorrow?"

"Certainly, sir."

"But why? But I thought—"

"Thought what, Your Excellency? That I would leave unclaimed all that valuable radio apparatus which your soldiers stupidly brought here following your visit to my house while I was absent at San Andres? Oh, no, sir. That needs explaining. Doubtless you had spoken to some officers of your household about our plan to move my San Andres experimental station into the palace. And this officer may have misunderstood; he may have believed it was intended to bring all my apparatus here, from my home as well as from San Andres. Indeed, you yourself may have made that mistake."

And Jack paused, as if inviting reply. None came.

"So I was coming tomorrow for the purpose of setting matters straight," he resumed. "Without two experimental stations—one here and one at my home. it is impossible to continue my work. Then, there is the matter of my assistant, Professor Bonatelli. I must have him at one or the other of my stations, or again the work cannot advance. It is a great honor to him to be invited here—as your guest. But while he enjoys your hospitality my work stops. And, of course," he added, watching keenly for the effect of this shot, "if my work is not

carried to a conclusion, my people will be reluctant to pay the balance of their license into your Excellency's coffers."

Jack stopped, and in the succeeding silence as his voice died away a faint knock as of some one distant tapping on wood could be heard. He was aware of it, but paid it no attention; nor did the Dictator, who seemed sunk in thought. The knocking was repeated, louder, more insistent. A frown crossed the Dictator's face, and without a word of excuse he got up and strode hastily to the rear of the great room, where he disappeared behind a heavy red curtain into a sort of alcove.

Left alone, Jack rehearsed what he had said, looking for flaws, and on the whole found it good. First of all, he had succeeded in casting over his enforced visit, over the seizure of all his radio apparatus from San Andres and from his home, and over the virtual arrest of Professor Bonatelli, an appearance that these actions had been carried out as the result of mutual agreement or of misunderstanding arising from such an agreement. If, now, therefore, he could bring the Dictator to fear that further tampering with the rights of an American citizen would bring down the wrath of the United States government, and to dread that further offensive moves would cost him final payments of the tribute being rendered by Jack's backers, then, the way would be open for retreat. Don Pedro would be able to retire with good grace. In the second

place, Jack believed that he had established a moral superiority over Don Pedro which was bound to count for something.

He forgot the nature of his unseen opponents.

Don Pedro lifting the heavy red curtain admitted a little light into a small alcove, just sufficient to reveal two men. Then dropping the curtain, he joined them in the shadowy gloom unlighted except for a thin aura that stole around the curtain's edge.

"You were not to rap for me unless it was absolutely necessary," he whispered.

"Your Excellency, it was more than necessary."

"Why? Speak quickly."

"That young American has the tongue of a serpent. Do not listen to him."

Don Pedro thought rapidly, acutely. Cupidity directed his reply.

"But his people pay well."

"So shall we. You already have an earnest of of that."

"I could get a huge sum from them."

"From us you can get double any amount they might pay."

"But their government! There are warships of the United States at Panama, not far away."

"He cannot appeal. He has no means of communication. His ambassador is absent, besides."

"But I suspect him of having friends in the city who would make his plight known. I know of one acquaintance."

"Silence them."

"If it cannot be done until too late, what then?"

"You can take your wealth to Europe, enjoy life in Paris and Madrid."

This appeal to the sybaritic nature of the Dictator had a powerful effect. Unfortunately for the two shades, the gloom did not permit of their reading his expression. Before they could press home their advantage, therefore, a counter thought occurred to the tempted man. He loved luxury, but he craved the exercise of power. Such power he knew he could wield nowhere else than in Valopia. Torn by twin demons, he decided to temporize.

"Enough," he whispered, starting to withdraw, "and be not worried. This young American shall not escape me."

But one of the shades laid on his arm a powerful hand that prevented withdrawal.

"But that is not enough," hissed a guttural voice, revealing the Teuton despite his use of Spanish. "We must have this missing portion of the American's invention of which Bonatelli speaks, or—"

"Or what?"

"Nothing, Your Excellency, except that your bankers in Paris will not receive a certain deposit to your credit until we have this missing device in our hands."

Making an inarticulate reply, Don Pedro tore himself free from the grip on his arm, and returned to his seat at the desk opposite Jack.

CHAPTER XVII.

DON PEDRO FORCED TO GO SLOW

DON PEDRO returned from his closet conference resolved on two things: He must obtain the vital link of Jack's Radio-Vision invention in order to collect a fortune from his tempters, and he must be wily as a serpent in order to prevent Jack from bringing about American intervention that would imperil his Dictatorship.

Yet this man who had demonstrated his ability to cope with knaves and to over-reach them was at a loss how to proceed in dealing with this young American. He could not understand in just what way it had been done, but he was uncomfortably aware that the youth on the other side of his desk had indeed established a moral superiority over him. To try to bulldoze, he felt assured would be useless. Therefore, as he resumed his seat and again addressed Jack, his tone was conciliatory.

"Senor, let us be frank with each other."

"I agree to that," answered Jack promptly. "You know, Your Excellency, I have been frank with you throughout."

With no desire to reply to that implication, the Dictator ignored it.

"Professor Bonatelli has been here several days."

"As your guest." There was thinly veiled sarcasm in Jack's tone.

"As my guest, Senor. Naturally I have talked with him about his work. This marvellous invention upon which you are engaged, and in which he assists you, is, indeed, something to give the world. Valopia may well be proud that it was born here."

"You smooth villain," thought Jack. "Trying to come around me in some way. Wish I knew whom you talked with those few minutes you were absent." Aloud, however, he replied: "It is as you say, Senor. But"—a spice of malicious mischief creeping into his voice—"Professor Bonatelli speaks only in technical terms. It must have been difficult to understand him."

"Oh, no, he gave me a very good idea of what you are trying to do and how you are seeking to do it."

"Now I wonder how much Bonatelli told you," thought Jack. "He's a loyal old cuss, but he's the scarey kind. Probably you make him tremble just by looking at him. It's barely possible that he betrayed me and mentioned the possibility that Frank has the vital link of my invention; but I won't believe it until I hear it from his own lips. Thanks to Frank's foresight, Bonatelli didn't see the removal of the Synchronizer and can't know where it is, even though he may suspect."

While these thoughts were going through his brain, Jack sat in silence. His manner was easy,

even nonchalant, like that of a good listener who waited for the speaker to continue. His gaze was bland and steady. It made Don Pedro uncomfortable, and he dropped his eyes and his voice lost a little of the suavity, a little of the assurance, with which he had returned fortified from his secret conference in the closet.

"Your assistant even told me that all parts of your invention were not among the apparatus awaiting you here," he resumed. This time he looked so expectant that Jack felt called on to reply.

"Indeed! And what did he say was missing?"

No question could have been more disconcerting. Truth to tell, Don Pedro did not know. All he knew was that Bonatelli, bullied and threatened with all sorts of dire consequences time and again, by himself and the two Germans, had declared his inability to demonstrate the Radio-Vision apparatus because of a missing device. A demonstration was what the German emissaries desired. If they could see the invention in operation, with everything painstakingly explained and taken down in shorthand by a secretary, they would be satisfied. They would then take the equipment and depart, and Don Pedro would receive a certain deposit to his credit at his Paris bank. Business diplomats, keen, shrewd, but without any specialized knowledge of radio, the two Germans were not able to visualize from Professor Bonatelli's technical description just what it was that was missing. They had failed with Bona-

telli; and, therefore, had been forced to resort to Jack himself.

Now Jack, of course, was unaware of what had transpired since Bonatelli's detention, and he had asked his question not from any realization of the effect it would produce but as a defensive measure in seeking to gain time. But his active brain was busy with surmise and conjecture, and when Don Pedro's answer to his question failed to come, and when the silence became prolonged, the truth of the matter began to dawn. Then conviction came; he saw how matters stood; and he chuckled gleefully to himself while remaining outwardly calm and expressionless.

With an effort to retain his fast-slipping hold on the situation, Don Pedro spoke hurriedly.

"Professor Bonatelli named the — the missing parts," he said.

"Oh, did he?"

In the ensuing silence again came the faint sound as of knuckles tapping on wood. This time, however, Don Pedro ignored the summons. Again it came, more insistent. Again he paid no attention, except that it seemed to Jack he shook his head slightly but decisively as if in refusal. The knocking was not repeated.

The Dictator almost beamed upon Jack, so friendly seemed his gaze. "Beware," said the latter to himself, sensing a change of attitude; "he's got something new up his sleeve."

"By the way, Senor," said Don Pedro, as if dis-

missing the matters having to do with Jack's invention and granting him the favor of indulging in a bit of social conversation, "by the way," he said, "how is your friend, the invalid young man from New York?"

Ah, an attack from a new and unexpected quarter! Jack's hands, which were thrust in his trouser pockets as he sat back comfortably in the deep chair, legs crossed, doubled up into fists. But he had command of himself. His face betrayed only faint surprise as he answered readily enough to the inquiry: "Do I know to whom you refer, Your Excellency?"

Inside, however brave his exterior, he was all a-tremble. Unaware of Frank's visit to El Miraflores that very day, he could not imagine how Don Pedro came to know of Bob. For the first time, he experienced a species of panic. Be it noted, however, this was because he suddenly saw his friends in danger of being drawn into difficulties, and not on his own account. "Careful, old thing," he warned himself; "he's laying a trap for you." And by a strong effort of will, he managed to retain his expression of inquiry unchanged and to keep his gaze from falling before that which his interlocutor bent upon him.

"Why, Senor," said Don Pedro, "a young business man from New York called on me today. He said that he and a companion had been in the city several days, but that heretofore he had been kept

from paying his respects because of his companion's illness. They are friends of yours, are they not?"

"Acquaintances," said Jack, putting all the carelessness which he could muster into his voice, but afraid to trust himself to further speech lest his voice tremble and betray him.

"But they call on you?"

"They called—once," corrected Jack.

"Ah, and that?"

"The day after they landed."

"So soon? And just acquaintances?"

Jack decided it would be wise to meet the question in word and glance. "Your Excellency," said he stiffly, as if resentful of any doubt cast upon his word, "they were strangers in a strange land; they had a mission to perform and did not know just how to set about it; and the American ambassador was absent: therefore, they appealed to me for information."

"And you?"

"Told them that if they desired to enter into business in Valopia, they must approach you."

This was uttered with so much seeming frankness, so much firmness, that the Dictator's slight suspicions thinned out and almost disappeared. Truth to tell, in betraying that Frank had called on him during the day, he had weakened his attack by arming Jack with vital knowledge. But of this, of course, he was unaware. Bonatelli, intimidated, frightened, had admitted that the two young Amer-

icans had called in the Hampton house the day after their arrival! But Hampton did not deny it; and, indeed, explained it away! It was a part of Don Pedro's code to suspect every man: therefore, he had suspected the possibility of Jack's seeking aid from his compatriots. For to whom else could he turn? It was on that account he had sought by his opening question to entrap Jack into betraying a deeper knowledge of the newcomers than one visit immediately on their arrival would seem to warrant. In that he had failed. Now it began to seem as if there were nothing beyond what appeared on the surface, after all.

Don Pedro was baffled. This interview begun with the intention of intimidating Jack had taken a contrary course. All this fencing had tired him. He decided that, before losing any more ground, he must have time to think matters over, to question Bonatelli again, to confer with the two precious rascals in his cabinet. He sought, therefore, to bring the interview to a close.

"It is very late, Senor," he said abruptly. "And I am tired."

Jack sensed a let-down of the tension. It was grateful, for the strain on him had been great. He smiled non-committally, awaiting what was to come. Would the Dictator allow him to return home? He entertained the fleeting hope that such would be the case, but did not really believe in it. His doubts were soon set at rest.

"All the material for your experiments is here, Senor," continued Don Pedro, smoothly. "You will want to begin tomorrow making arrangements for continuing your labors. If you will honor me by being my guest tonight?"

Jack bowed in acknowledgment. What else was there for it?

"And tomorrow?" he asked. "You will recall, Your Excellency, that I spoke of the necessity for two stations, if my work is to go forward—here and at my home."

"Tomorrow we shall see," said the Dictator, tapping a bell.

The door opened and Captain Miranda entered.

"You will see that the Senor Hampton is treated as a distinguished guest," said Don Pedro. And to Jack: "Until the morrow, Senor."

Again Jack bowed slightly, then followed the guardsman from the room.

"Senor," said the latter cryptically, "I like brave men."

Before Jack could seek the reason for this statement, they were at the door of a room. A servant joined them, and Jack was shown inside. The door closed behind him, and he was alone.

He could not know that Captain Miranda, being often alone in the ante-room on occasions of importance, had found the tedious passage of time difficult to support, and for lack of something better (or worse) to do had managed to cut a hole in

the wall at a certain spot where his head was accustomed to rest when he sat in a back-tilted chair. This hole, hidden behind a fold of heavy velvet curtain, was like a speaking tube. And this accounted, doubtless, for the fact that the worthy guardsman no longer found long waits in the anteroom hanging heavy on his hands.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ANTONIO MAKES A SUGGESTION

WHEN Frank threw himself on his bed after Antonio's departure, his brain was whirling with a myriad of thoughts. He believed he would be unable to sleep. There was so much to be considered: he must get in touch with Rafaela to learn the truth about Jack's arrest, to find out in what way he could help her; he must plan how to utilize Antonio's services not only to free Jack but also to preserve his radio secrets from the Germans; he must devise a method of aiding Antonio by the use of his knowledge of radio, in return for the rebel chieftain's help; and he must turn over in his mind the possibility of a sudden descent of the Dictator's guards upon himself and Bob, and be prepared to meet such a contingency. But tired nature asserted its claims, and instead of thinking constructively about anything, Frank went to sleep.

He was awakened by Antonio's hand on his shoulder after he had slept five hours. In other circumstances, so little sleep would not have been sufficient, he would have felt sluggish. But one glance at Antonio's face was enough to bring him

out of bed with a bound, his brain alert, anxious, filled with fears which that sober countenance aroused.

"What's the matter? How's Bob? Has anything happened? Has the Dictator found us out?"

He shot these questions at the Valopian in rapid succession, at the same time stripping off his pajamas and frantically clawing his way into his clothes.

Antonio's eyes began to twinkle, his features relaxed, and sitting down suddenly on the side of the tumbled bed, he began to laugh.

"Well, what's so funny? Tell me, and I'll laugh, too." Frank was already clothed from the waist down, and, giving a last twist to a recalcitrant shoe lace, straightened up with a red face and an injured expression that set the other to laughing anew.

"Can you laugh at yourself?"

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, you jump out of bed and start to dress like a fireman."

Frank standing over his companion in a somewhat belligerent attitude, relaxed at this. A slow grin spread over his face.

"Fireman? Huh. You ought to see a New York fireman when the gong rings."

A little amusement still lurked in Antonio's eyes as he replied, but his voice was sober.

"My friend, I know. That's why I spoke. I lived in a rooming house next to a fire station in

Twenty-third Street. They were my friends, some of those fine fellows. Ah, well," he sighed a little, then jumped down from his seat on the bed and strode briskly to the open window where he stood gazing out into the patio.

Frank crossed the room and stood beside him.

Dawn had just broken. The green leaves of the trees, the flaming petals of the poinsettia, glistened with the dew which the rising sun would soon drink up. Already the coolness of the night had passed away, and the chatter of birds was stilled.

"Twenty-third Street," mused Frank aloud, staring out into the freshness of a new day with unseeing eyes, for his glance was turned inward. "What a long way off it seems. Like another world."

Antonio did not reply and, coming back to the present, Frank turned to him with a question.

"But you haven't told me yet. Has anything new happened over night?"

"Somewhat depends on what you mean by that word, 'new,' " Antonio smiled.

"When you shook me, I was startled. I didn't know what had happened, but I suppose I figured it was something urgent or you wouldn't have roused me so early in the morning. Well, you see, the day has hardly come yet. That's why I asked you all those questions." Frank spoke a bit defensively.

Antonio did not reply directly to all this, as, indeed, would have been impossible. Instead, he said:

"I wish to take ride, and would like to have you come with me. And as this ride will be a long one, we should make an early start."

"Oh, we are going somewhere!" Frank's gaze was searching. Then a light of understanding leaped up in his eyes. "To San Andres?"

Antonio nodded.

"To find Jack's friend, Jose, and see whether he can help us?"

"To find him, yes. And partly for that reason, but also—"

Frank did not allow him to conclude. "I know what you mean," he interrupted. His voice was eager. "You want to link up his rebel forces with your own, don't you? Well, listen, Antonio; I have a plan."

"What is it?"

"We'll take this radio stuff of Jack's and turn it over to Jose to keep in safety. Get it out of the house here, you know. Then if the Dictator does decide to raid us, he won't find what he's looking for."

"No, Senor, we won't do that."

Frank's face fell. "But why not, Antonio? The house isn't being watched yet. We'll be able to take the radio stuff away without being detected."

"Quite right, Senor. The house, as you say, is not being watched—by the Dictator's spies. But it is being watched by my men. And if we are to be raided we shall be warned. Likewise, it is true that we can remove this great treasure of the Senor

Hampton without being detected by those who desire to appropriate it. And it is to propose that we shall so remove it to a place of greater safety, before going to San Andres, that I arouse you so early."

Frank looked just about as puzzled as he felt. "What's that, Antonio? Hide our radio equipment somewhere else? Not at San Andres? But where?"

"Senor, at Miguel's."

"Look here, Antonio, I don't know what you mean."

"I shall explain. But would it not be better that you complete dressing, and come to breakfast? Manuel is busied preparing it now. We can talk then at the same time that you eat."

Frank hesitated. He sensed that he was on the eve of interesting revelations. Antonio's reference could mean only one thing, and that was a rebel headquarters somewhere in the city. He was anxious to hear what Antonio would have to say. But the telling doubtless would take time, and he was hungry. The breakfast appeal was powerful. While he was still undecided whether to accede to the Valopian's wishes or to press him for further information at once, Bob's voice was raised in a stentorian call from the adjoining room.

Both started, looking at each other with surprise which in Frank's case was succeeded by dawning delight as Bob continued to call. Surely all that volume could mean nothing less than that the patient was pretty much himself again. All this time

the bellow continued: "Hey, Frank, time to get up. Can't you smell Manuel's breakfast? I'm ready to eat a man's-size meal myself, I can tell you." These last words were uttered in a louder tone as the communicating door between the bedrooms was suddenly flung open, revealing the big fellow in a billowing striped bath robe that made him appear to be even more mountainous than usual.

"Oh, there you are," he cried, advancing into the room. "Hello, Tony."

Frank hurried to his side. "How do you feel, Bob?"

"All right except kind of shaky on my legs. But no wonder," grumbled the other sinking down on Frank's bed. "I'm hollow clear down to my toes. What I need is food, and lots of it."

Antonio withdrew, and then, after Bob had brushed aside Frank's objections to his getting up, the two turned inevitably to the subject uppermost in both their minds. Learning that Antonio had promised certain revelations would be made at breakfast, Bob insisted on dressing and descending to the dining room, so, their ablutions performed, they went down together.

Over the tops of the trees in the patio, among the leaves, the sun was shining through the eastern windows. The brightness of the day joined to the relief he experienced in seeing Bob once more on his feet put Frank in a gay mood, and he began to sing in the baritone, not unmusical, which, how-

ever, always sounded a bit strange coming from him—the smallest of the three comrades. From the young Colossus beside him came a high tenor that rang changes on the popular air which everybody had been singing when the two put New York behind them.

After a bar or two of this, Antonio came in from the pantry bearing a huge platter of yellow omelet stripped with bacon, from which rose an appetitizing odor. With an exclamation, Frank abruptly ceased singing and sprang to take the plate from the Valopian. He was waved aside, and the platter deposited on the table.

"But, Great Scott, Antonio," protested Frank. "You're not a servant, and now that we know it we may as well end this masquerade."

Bob caught the twinkle in the other's eye, and broke into laughter. "Now's the time, Tony, to quote a classic line like 'Honest labor is not demeaning.' "

Antonio's laugh rang out in response. "Ah, Senor, it is you who know how to live. But, listen"—waving aside Frank's continued protests—"I accept your money to be your steward or whatever you please to term my position. That is as it should be, and it does not prevent my being your friend."

"No, no," Frank continued to protest, and then brightening: "Tell you what. We're all in the same boat, so we'll just split the work to be done, just as if we were on a camping trip. That's the ans-

wer. And now, if you fellows agree, let's get down to breakfast. I'm hungry as a bear, and Manuel's omelet looks like a real creation. It's my turn to do a little foot work, so I'll bring in the coffee. The rest of you fall to, don't wait for me." He pressed Antonio into a chair, and disappeared in the pantry.

For some minutes following Frank's return, silence descended in the sunny dining room, broken only by the clink of spoon against cup or the rattle of silver. Thoughts were busy, however, and after a brief interval devoted to trencher work, Frank put down his coffee cup and addressed Antonio.

"Tell us about Miguel's. What is it? Where is it? And why should we take Jack's radio stuff there?"

"To the first question, it is a waterfront inn."

"But I thought the Valopian waterfront was the toughest in all Spanish-America."

"It is. And that is a protection."

"What do you mean?"

"Miguel is an old sea-captain who has cast anchor ashore. In the slums surrounding him live many devoted to his interests, who would even give their lives for him."

Bob who had not spoken before now put in a word. "Sort of another Dictator, hey?"

"You might say so."

"Well, but why should we take this tremendously valuable radio stuff there?" demanded Frank. "It might be safe enough from the Dictator's hands, but it would lie useless. Now, if we take it out to

San Andres and find this chap, Jose, why, we may be able to get help from him and his band to bring about Jack's release."

"Senor, listen." Antonio pushed aside his plate, refusing Bob's proffer of a second help of omelet, but permitting Frank to refill his coffee cup. "I wish to meet this Jose and to have a talk with him. It is true that he can be of much help. So we shall visit him. But installed at Miguel's, the Radio-Vision device of your friend, the Senor Hampton, will be far more useful than at San Andres. Of this much, I can, indeed, assure you; and if you will but take my word for it without asking me to explain, we shall save time. For there is much to be done today. However, if you desire—." Leaving the sentence unfinished, he looked inquiringly from one to the other.

CHAPTER XIX.

JACK'S DARKEST HOUR BEFORE DAWN

AFTER his interview with Don Pedro, Jack found difficulty in composing himself to sleep. Knowing well the value of even a few hours of slumber, he undressed and flung himself on the bed, determined to relax and obtain a little rest. But the crowding thoughts refused to be thrust aside. What was happening to Rafaela? Would Frank and Bob be drawn into this? Would the Germans succeed in obtaining the secrets of his radio invention; and how could he, almost alone and unaided, prevent them, backed as they were by the absolute power of the Dictator, from doing so?

He thought with something akin to despair of the absence of the American ambassador. If only this man, his natural protector, had been at his post! If only he had left a courageous man in charge of the embassy! Yet was it not likely that, in such circumstances, the Dictator, coveting the truly enormous sum which the foreign interests seeking Jacks invention must be dangling before his eyes, would have found some subtle method for over-reaching all opposition? Indeed, Jack, knowing the rapacious, cruel nature of the man, felt the force of this argument. In the darkness, his eyes

strained wide in terror, he felt as if he were suffocating, for it seemed to him suddenly as if he stood on the brink of a bottomless abyss toward which some irresistible force was slowly and inexorably forcing him.

Naturally courageous, quick-witted in a crisis, slow to yield to despair, yet now Jack trembled as never before in his life. He had been brave enough before the Dictator, but now he could not even find it in his heart to feel any pride in his stand. He was alone, a prisoner in the stronghold of an implacable man who desired his invention and, if he was thwarted, would not hesitate at anything to gain his ends. To do justice, it was not on his own account that Jack yielded momentarily to panic; although he shuddered at recalling certain whispered tales of torture. But he thought of Rafaela, who was in the Dictator's power; and he realized that if this dark man once thought of striking at him through his wife, neither her sex nor her American citizenship would protect her.

It was little enough, it seemed to him in these black moments, that his comrades could do to help. The range of their radio equipment was too small to permit of their calling an American warship from the Canal. Besides, did they succeed in getting through with an appeal for help, the response would be problematical. America and Valopia were at peace; there was no known radio station in Valopia from which such a message could be expected to emanate; it was more than likely, therefore, that

it would be treated as a hoax. Even if believed, action would be delayed while, first of all, red tape was unwound, and, secondly, the intervening distance was covered.

It was true that Frank had spoken of the possibility of getting help from the Valopian malcontents. But as yet there was no open rebellion; Jose and his band at San Andres were really no more than banditti. To whom, then, could the boys turn? Thus Jack reasoned, knowing nothing of Antonio's revelations to his old comrades.

No, the Dictator wanted his invention in order to collect a huge sum from the German radio interests whose men had sought him out. He had done all he could to protect his secrets. But if the lives, safety or honor of his wife and his comrades was to be imperilled, then he must give up. Better far that all his work should go only to create profits for those who might steal it, that the honor of perfecting the first practicable Radio-Vision apparatus should never publicly be his, better far all this than that Rafaela, Frank or Bob should come to any harm through him.

Unable longer to lie still and bear these tortured thoughts, Jack arose and with long disordered strides began pacing up and down the room. Yes, as soon as daybreak came he would summon an attendant and demand another interview with Don Pedro. Him, he would tell all. But at this resolve another complication arose. Bob and Frank had the Synchronizer in their keeping. How reveal its

whereabouts to the Dictator, how obtain it even, without involving them? For a moment, he was again dismayed; then the courage of despair possessed him. There must be a way out, and a little thought would find it. Upon this, he paused beside a window toward which unconsciously his steps had borne him. And looking out, he saw far below the dark gardens beginning to take shadowy form, and the gray dawn in the east.

His brain was numb, poor boy. He had no idea how many hours he had been awake, first tossing in the dark, a prey to myriad worries, then stalking the floor. But that glimpse of a free world outside this prison, this torture chamber was like a glass of cold water dashed in the face of a fainting man in its effect upon him. He rubbed his hot dry eyelids with shaking hands, and, shivering, realized for the first time that he had been striding up and down a cold chamber, chilled by the night air, clad only in pajamas. Feeling suddenly as tired as ever he had left in his life, he turned with stumbling steps, made his way to the bed, and, tumbling in, drew up the blankets and so, at last, fell asleep.

How long he slept, he did not know, when the slanting rays of the sun, streaming in through the eastern window, rested warm on his face and aroused him. Only half-awake, he flung up an arm to shield his eyes, and turned to present his back to the sunlight. He wanted to sleep again, but sleep had fled. And after a few moments of toss-

ing, he came fully awake, whereupon, suddenly realizing where he was and under what circumstances, he got out of bed.

A glance now at his watch showed him the day was nearing noon, and this the position of the sun confirmed. All the worries of the night came flooding back, and with them the recollection of his resolve to bare all to the Dictator. His lips set in a firm line. He was still of the same mind. Finding a tiled bath behind a panelled door, he turned on the taps, leaped in and, after a brisk rub, began to dress. He would pound on the door, ring a bell, do anything that would summon an attendant; and then demand to be taken straight-away to the Dictator.

While he was in the midst of dressing, however, the lock clicked, the door was opened, and Captain Miranda entered the room. With a disarming smile, as if the fact that he was in the position of a jailer held no tenure in his thoughts, the officer, closing the door behind him, went up to Jack and, dropping a friendly hand on his shoulders, said: "How you have slept!"

"Slept? Slept?" Jack looked dazed, thinking of those long wakeful hours before slumber finally had come.

The smile broadened, and Captain Miranda burst into a laugh. "Why, yes, you're not really awake yet. I looked into your room hours ago to see whether you would care to accompany me on an inspection of posts."

"Inspect posts?"

"Oh, yes, I do that every morning and night. We are very military here, you know."

"And when you looked in I was asleep?"

"A cannon could not have waked you."

"Well, you see—." Jack hesitated. After all, why reveal that anxiety had kept him awake to the point of exhaustion!

The officer misread his hesitation. "I know what you would say: that there is nothing to bother about, so why not sleep. Ah, Senor, I repeat: I like a brave man."

"Look here," said Jack, "that's twice you've made that remark. What do you mean by it?"

"What do I mean? Oh, Senor, nothing, believe me. A compliment, that is all."

This remark was lightly enough turned, but it was accompanied by a look which said more plainly than words that it would be useless to question Captain Miranda further along the same line.

Jack understood. "Well," he said, adjusting his tie before a mirror, and attempting a lightness he did not feel, "what sort of food have you for guests? Bread and water, or something a bit more substantial? I confess that, having slept through breakfast, I can certainly do justice to lunch."

"Lunch? Oh, certainly. But, Senor, it was not to summon you to luncheon that I came. That is for servants, to call people to the table." He drew himself up a trifle coldly.

Busied with his tie, Jack missed this evidence of

pique. "Well, but what, then, brings you, Captain?" With a last pat at his throat, he faced about. "Does Don Pedro wish to see me, for if he does we are one? It is my desire now to have an interview as soon as possible."

"He has said nothing this morning regarding you," said the officer, a bit perplexed. "I of course could tell his secretary of your request, if you desire. But, Senor, somebody else wishes to see you."

"Somebody else? Who?"

"Your wife."

Excitement leaped up in Jack at once. "My wife? And you keep me waiting and talking! Oh, Captain! Come, where is she?" And he sprang toward the door.

Captain Miranda laid a hand on his arm. "Not so quickly, Senor. It must first be arranged. Besides, she is not alone."

"Not alone? But who accompanies her?"

"A countryman of yours, a young man."

The soldier's glance was searching.

Jack looked first puzzled, then disbelieving.

"Not," he began, then left the sentence unfinished, adding in an abrupt tone: "Tell me his name."

"The Senor Merrick."

Jack sat down suddenly. His knees were too weak to support him. "Frank here, Frank Merrick, and with Rafaela?" he questioned, as if speaking to himself. "Where are they, Captain? Take me to them."

"I cannot do that," said Captain Miranda, as

Jack got a trifle unsteadily to his feet. "You see, they await an interview with Don Pedro."

"With Don Pedro? But I thought they came to see me."

"Oh, yes, only they must first talk with Don Pedro. You understand, of course, Senor."

Jack's face fell. He understood only too well. If not, the significance of the officer's glance would have informed him. He was a prisoner, even though courteously treated as a guest. None could see him, talk with him, without Don Pedro's consent. And, suppose that consent was witheld, what then? Was he to be denied a visit from Rafaela. A greater anger than he had yet experienced against that unscrupulous man who held them all in his power welled up in his breast. His eyes gleamed, his face was contorted with rage. Discreetly, Captain Miranda let his eyes turn aside, and when he returned Jack's gaze the latter had himself in hand again.

Here at the very moment when he had reached a decision to bare all to the Dictator came the unexpected to upset his plans, Jack was thinking. For a sudden exultant premonition that more lay behind the visit of Rafaela and Frank than mere desire to see him thrilled him through. Therefore, he would not ask for an interview with Don Pedro, but would await developments.

Thus far had he proceeded in his thoughts when it occurred to him to wonder why Captain Miranda should have come to apprise him of the presence of

his wife and friend. The officer's expression was so bland, so innocent, as he leaned nonchalantly on the back of a chair, drawing a handkerchief through his fingers, that there was nothing to be gained by a study of his face. He liked Jack, liked Rafaela, and had gone a bit out of his way to be pleasant to them. Perhaps, what he had done would be frowned upon by Don Pedro. But then Jack was not prepared to draw much comfort from it, remembering those words in which the guardsman had described himself and his code on the trip to San Andres. However, for what he had done, Jack was enormously grateful. If nothing else had been accomplished, at least he had been saved from making the fatal step of going to the Dictator before his friends were given a real opportunity to extricate him from his predicament. Remembering their ingenuity under other adverse circumstances in the past, he realized now that he had despaired too soon. For that Frank's audacious visit in company with Rafaela was a step in some deep laid plan on his behalf, he had never a doubt.

Putting some of his gratitude into his voice, Jack thanked the officer for his information. The other smiled easily by way of reply, and straightening up flicked a speck of lint from the cuff of his guardsman's jacket.

"It was nothing," he deprecated. "I merely thought you would like to know." He turned toward the door. "Oh, by the way, Senor, shall I order luncheon served you here?"

"Then I am to keep to my room?" demanded Jack, going straight to the point.

"For the present, yes, Senor."

"Very well; and thanks for your kind offer. I am hungry."

Captain Miranda was nearing the door when, apparently by accident, he pulled a handkerchief from a pocket and a square envelope came with it and fell to the floor. Jack called, but the guardsman opened the door and started to leave the room as if he had not heard. So Jack strode hastily after him, picked up the envelope and touching him on the arm held the missive outstretched.

"Oh, but this is not mine, said Captain Miranda. "See, it is even addressed to you."

Then he went out, the lock clicked as the key was turned in it from the outside, and a quick martial step was heard dying away in the corridor. Jack stood as if stupefied, rooted to the spot, unable to move, the envelope held up before him. Written across its face was his own name. The hand was that of his wife.

At last, with a little cry, he tore the envelope open and with trembling fingers drew out the enclosure. It was brief, and his eyes devoured it so rapidly that his brain scarce took in the meaning of the words. He re-read it a second time, and again a third. Then he sank into a chair, staring into space; his arms dropped to his sides, and the letter fell unheeded to the floor.

CHAPTER XX.

FRANK PROPOSES AN AMENDMENT

LET us turn our attention to the dining room of the old Pedrarias mansion, where Antonio had just suggested that Frank and Bob permit him to dictate a course of conduct without an explanation of the reasons. The two looked at each other questioningly. Desirous as they were that no time should be lost in the accomplishment of whatever steps were to be taken, yet they read in each other's glances an unwillingness to walk blindly. Frank shook his head and addressed the Valopian.

"It isn't that we don't trust you, Antonio, and, in fact, it ought to be needless to give you that assurance. But I do think that we ought to lay all our cards on the table, so to speak. Let us know where we stand, and talk it over a little. Perhaps, Bob and I might have a thought or two on the matter that would be worth while. Anyhow, we don't want to act in the dark."

Antonio nodded. If he experienced a sense of pique at his judgment being questioned, he did not betray it. "Very well," he said. "I shall be brief. To begin with, Miguel's is the meeting place of

those opposed to Don Pedro. I was there last night, and learned—"

Rapidly, succinctly, he painted for his absorbed listeners the scene of the night before in Miguel's upstairs room. Then, without giving them an opportunity to comment, he launched into an elaboration of the plan for discovering the traitors through the use of Jack's Radio-Vision invention, which we have heard him touch upon in his talk with Miguel. He leaned back in his chair and, lighting a cigarette, blew a cloud of smoke toward the ceiling. "So there is work for us all to do," he said, in conclusion. "And we had best be about it without loss of time."

"A lot of work to be done, all right," grumbled Bob. "But where do I fit in? You and Frank will get all the action."

"But, Senor, you are too weak from your illness to ride to San Andres. And for the moment, what else is there to do?"

"Huh. At least I can call upon Rafaela, and post her about what to say to Jack."

Frank, who had been picking at the table cloth with the tines of a fork, absorbed in his own thoughts, looked up and shook his head. "Better stick around here another day, Bob. That'll really put you on your feet for when the big affair comes off. You want to be in on that, don't you?"

Before Bob could make any reply, Frank abandoned his lounging attitude and sat up straight. "Look here, you've got a good plan, Antonio, a peach

of a plan. If we can only carry it out, it will help you and will help us. Jack will gain his freedom and his radio secrets will be preserved from falling into other hands; and you, in turn, will be able to execute a *coup* whereby the traitor or traitors to your Cause will work unwillingly for you, and will bring about the downfall of the Dictator. Am I right?"

Antonio nodded.

"So far, so good. It is a plan that commits us to a breach of neutrality, but under the circumstances I feel that we shall be fully justified in lending ourselves to it. The Dictator is a tyrant who ought to be removed. And if you help us to save Jack, Bob and I certainly will be glad to help you. As for Jack, I can answer for him, if—" And here Frank paused a long time, so long, indeed, that Antonio was prompted to ask anxiously: "If what, Senor?"

"Why, you haven't figured out how we are going to get word to Jack; how we are going to tell him what our plans are, and in what way he must lend his aid."

"Oh, but, yes. I shall communicate with Mrs. Hampton through Tomaso as before; or else the Senor Temple might call on her personally, as he proposes. All this I have said before."

"Then what?"

"Why, she will go to El Miraflores, of course, and inform her husband."

Frank shook his head. "And that's just the weak spot. Suppose the Dictator refuses to permit Rafaela to see Jack, to talk with him, what then?"

"We would have to find some other way to get in communication with your friend. A palace attendant might be bribed."

"To carry Jack a message? Yes, that might be done. But we wouldn't be certain it had been delivered or understood. Besides, the whole success of the plan depends on Jack's rigging up his Radio-Vision apparatus in the Dictator's cabinet tonight. If delays occur, well, the whole plan would fail."

"Senor, this is as you say the weak point of the campaign. What would you propose?"

"Listen." Frank got up and took a short turn or two about the room. Halting by Bob's chair, he dropped a hand on his friend's shoulder. Then he went on: "I must interview the Dictator."

"You must—" But Bob, glancing upward at his companion, was struck momentarily speechless. "You're crazy, fellow," he concluded.

As for Antonio, his eyes were puzzled but also eager. "Go on, Senor, I beg you."

"I must take Rafaela with me." And now words poured from Frank as in a flood. "I'll do all the talking, and Rafaela, who is a little actress, if ever there was one, can cry a bit now and then just to strengthen what I say.

"This is what I'll tell Don Pedro: 'Your Excellency,' I'll say, 'when I called today at the home of

my friend, the Senor Jack Hampton, imagine my amazement to learn from his wife that he was being detained by you! The Senora told me her husband was under suspicion of using his radio apparatus in behalf of certain disaffected Valopians who presume to be dissatisfied with the wise manner in which you administer the country. Thereupon, I asked some questions and learned that all my friend's radio apparatus had been removed to El Miraflores. I was puzzled, indeed, for I know the Senor Hampton to be in Valopia for a certain purpose which has no political complexion whatsoever. It seemed to me that if only he would give Your Excellency a demonstration of the great radio invention to the development of which he has been devoting his time and energy since coming to your country that you would be convinced of his innocence of any complicity with the rebels.'

"At this," Frank interpolated for the benefit of his absorbed audience, "the old boy is bound to pick up his ears, for that's just what he wants—a demonstration. But neither Bonatelli nor Jack can give him a demonstration. Because why? Because the key to the whole invention, the Synchronizer, has disappeared. Now hold on, Bob," he added, pressing down on the shoulder of his seated companion, who seemed on the verge of explosion. "Give me time, give me time.

"So, then," he continued, "when Don Pedro hears that statement it will put him in a mighty receptive

frame of mind for what I propose. Then I'll go on like this: 'Now, Your Excellency, I know the Senor Hampton is doubtless very reluctant to betray any of the secrets connected with his invention lest they fall into the hands of business enemies. Therefore, in all likelihood, he has kept silent so far on the subject of demonstrating his device. He feels, I am sure, that it would be unfair to his American backers to betray his plans to anybody. And he is prepared to go to any lengths to keep his secrets. In fact, he is what we Americans would call bull-headed.' "

Frank broke away, obviously enjoying this oration, and began to stride up and down the room, but without ceasing the flow of words and sentences that cascaded from him with such rapidity as to prevent interruption from his stupefied companions.

Addressing his imaginary auditor, the Dictator, he continued: "But Your Excellency is not a business rival, and my poor pig-headed friend should be made to see that he would incur no risks in demonstrating his invention for you. It is on that account, sir, that I have come to you. I find the poor Senora Hampton weeping bitterly because her husband is in disgrace, and it moves my heart. I feel that I must do what I can to help her, to help my friend. And I realize that the best thing I can do for all concerned is to help make clear to you that the Senor Hampton's radio work is solely in the interests of science, and has no connection with

the plottings of your enemies. Your Excellency, I desire that the Senor Hampton should demonstrate his invention for you, so that you may see exactly what he is doing. So I have come to you today. I beg that you permit me to talk with my friend, so that I may make him understand the necessity for demonstrating his device to you. I am quite certain that I can bring him to see this matter in the proper light, and that as a result you will profess yourself satisfied of his innocence of complicity with the rebels."

Frank Halted in front of his companions, who remained seated at the table, stricken dumb with amazement. His eyes gleamed, his cheeks were flushed. It seemed, indeed, as if he were unaware of their presence, until suddenly he struck the table a sharp blow with a clenched fist that made the dishes rattle, and cried: "Do you begin to see, you fellows? Then I'll play my trump card. 'Look here, Your Excellency,' I'll tell the old boy, 'the reason why I know so much about this, and why I am in a position to straighten out this tangle, is because when I first came to Valopia the Senor Hampton placed a certain box in my safe-keeping. I believe this to be the key to his whole invention. If now my friend consents to the course I have outlined, I shall return this to his home in the city, where his assistant can set it up and operate it at the same time that the Senor Hampton operates that other portion of his device which is here at El Mira-

flores. But, of course, I cannot do this until I have his consent, and that I must receive personally. I, therefore, request the privilege of an interview with him, an interview at which I beg that you be present.'

"There," cried Frank triumphantly, appealing to his companions, "what do you think of that? Think it will work, hey?" And he would have continued, but interruptions at length burst from both.

"You're crazy, crazy as a loon," spluttered Bob.

And Antonio, looking utterly amazed, gasped: "What, give up the Synchronizer?"

"No, no; not in a million years." Frank was impatient. Then he checked himself. "Sorry," he said, contritely. "I'm thinking ahead of you, and haven't made myself clear. But this is the way it will work out." He dropped into a chair. "The old boy is bound to let me see Jack and have a talk with him, after a proposal like that, isn't he?"

"Sure. But what good will it do you, with the Dictator present and listening to everything you say?" This from Bob. "Besides, the Synchronizer—"

"I'm coming to that. But the big thing to be considered, first of all, is that I'll get to see and talk with Jack. I don't care how much the Dictator listens in. I'll manage to persuade Jack to do what we want him to do, that is to set up his broadcaster in the Dictator's office, and to get it functioning at the right time to fit in with your plans, An-

tonio. Old Don Pedro can listen to every word, and he won't be any the wiser."

"But the Synchronizer, the Synchronizer," Antonio's dark thin face, creased in a frown, was bent forward across the table.

"It will be where you want it to be. It'll be set up at Miguel's. And when the traitors to your Cause step into the Dictator's office to night, you'll see them thrown on the screen by the Synchronizer, and you'll recognize them, and you'll hear every word they say."

Bob feebly waved his hands. "Have a heart. I hear what you say, but it doesn't make sense."

Then at length Frank took pity on his bewildered companions. "You big boob," he said, good-naturedly, "we'll rig up that two-way radio set which Jack gave us, and make them believe it's the Synchronizer. It won't work, of course, but what do we care?"

CHAPTER XXI.

BOB COMES TO LIFE

A BELLOW of laughter from Bob, a short, abrupt "Hah!" from Antonio, signalized their appreciation of Frank's audacity. And Antonio added, with a graciousness which brought a flush of pleasure to the cheeks of both youths: "I am glad, indeed, Senor, that you demanded to talk the matter over and did not accept my half-formed plans without discussion. Your contribution is invaluable. But now as time is flying and as there is much to be done, let us go over everything quickly."

Frank agreed. "Right. We may not manage to get our heads together again before tonight. And we want to be sure that everything goes off without a hitch."

The plan, in brief, was for the execution of a *coup d'etat* on the following night, which, it was hoped, would bring about the downfall of the Dictator, and would place control of the government in the hands of Antonio and his Patriots. Antonio was to make a hurried trip to San Andres for the purpose of enlisting Jose and his band in the project. His inquiries among his Patriot friends had

brought little information regarding this mysterious old man; but that he would march to the attack of El Miraflores, Antonio somehow felt assured. Returning from San Andres, Antonio was to summon a hurried council of the Patriots at Miguel's, including Feldman and Francisco de la Cruz among those called. Withholding from all except Miguel the fact of an alliance having been consummated with the San Andres bandit leader, he would inform the Council that on the following night he planned to put himself at the head of a band recruited by Miguel along the waterfront and seize the Presidential Palace in the city, which was only lightly guarded during the Dictator's residence at El Miraflores. Whoever were the traitors would then, he believed, carry the word when darkness came to El Miraflores.

At this the eyes of all three gleamed with satisfaction.

"Jack will have his broadcaster set up in the Dictator's office, and you will have the Synchronizer at Miguel's," summed up Frank. "You'll be sure to find out who the real traitors are, and you'll hear every word they say."

"Such, of course, is my hope. And thanks to your excellent idea for personally telling the Senor Jack Hampton how to aid us by setting up his invention in Don Pedro's very office, I feel assured that hope will be realized."

"But will the traitors carry word of your plans

to Don Pedro—at least of those plans which you want him to believe you intend to carry out?" asked Bob.

"I shall return from San Andres in time for a meeting of the Council at 7 o'clock. At 10 o'clock, or shortly thereafter, whoever it is in our Council who is betraying our secrets, will present himself at El Miraflores. There can be no doubt of that. He will believe, of course, that he has obtained the most important secret of all to sell."

"The most important?" asked Bob.

"Yes. For if I, the leader of the revolutionary movement; I, who have long directed it from New York, and who now have come here to place myself at its head, if I, I say, advance into the open, Don Pedro will see his opportunity to capture me. For such information he will pay well. And, realizing this, the traitor will hasten from the Council meeting to El Miraflores as fast as possible."

"You have no fear?"

"No. For as you know the demonstration against the Presidential Palace will be only a feint."

"For the purpose of drawing the Dictator's troops away from El Miraflores, I think you said, didn't you?"

"That is right."

"And you feel certain that Don Pedro will not accompany his troops?"

"No, for he is a coward, and does not fight at the head of his men. He will stay behind at El

Miraflores, waiting for word from the city that I have been captured or slain."

Bob nodded with satisfaction.

"I've got it all straight now. And then, when El Miraflores is practically defenceless, Jose will swoop down with his band from San Andres."

"Yes, and I shall be with them. I have an account to settle with Don Pedro."

Antonio's gaze grew sombre, but only for a moment. Then he stood up with an air of determination.

"Everything is understood, then. So now let us go to work. You, my good friend," he said to Frank, "will call on the Senora Hampton and accompany her to El Miraflores for the purpose of carrying out your daring project. For myself, I must see that the Senor Hampton's radio device is taken to Miguel's, and must then leave for San Andres at once. There is not any too much time in which to make the journey to San Andres and to return in time for the Council meeting which Miguel will call. But I know where to get a good horse, capable of making the journey. So now let us be off."

"Wait a minute, Tony," said Bob, heaving to his feet. "You're leaving me entirely out of your calculations. Is that a fair way to treat a friend?"

"Oh, but, Senor, your illness!"

"If I stick around here with nothing to do, I'll be the sickest fellow in town before nightfall," said

Bob violently. "No, you can't count me out. I'll take the Synchronizer to this Miguel myself, and I'll stay there and operate it for you tonight. Did you think that you fellows who don't know anything at all about radio could run the machine? Thought, I suppose, that all you'd have to do would be to throw a switch or something? Shucks. You make me sick."

"But, my friend, you don't know Miguel, you don't know how to get to his inn."

"Manuel knows, doesn't he? He's one of your gang, isn't he? Guess he can guide me."

Antonio was struck with the force of this suggestion.

"It is true that someone who understands the Senor Hampton's invention should be on hand tonight to operate it. And certainly, if I can leave at once for San Andres, without delaying first to go to Miguel's, I shall save time. Senor, I accept, and thank you for your kindness."

"Kindness? You couldn't keep me out of this. I'd get up out of a sick bed to take part. What I plan to do is little enough, but you fellows have taken all the 'fat' parts. However, little as my part will be, I feel a hundred per cent. improved already." And Bob launched at Frank a playful blow that would have felled an ox if it had landed, but which his companion managed to sidestep.

"Very well. I shall call Manuel, and tell him to prepare a little cart in which he can transport the Syn-

chronizer to Miguel's as if he were carrying fresh vegetables from a market. You can follow him at a discreet distance. But first let me write Miguel a note of instructions."

From a pocket Antonio drew a notebook, and tearing out a leaf wrote rapidly for several minutes.

"There," he said, handing the note to Bob. Manuel will vouch for you, and that shall be a further passport. It instructs Miguel in regard to the calling of a meeting for 7 o'clock tonight. In addition, Senor, please tell him of our discussion here, and of what we are trying to do."

"All right," said Bob, tucking the note into an inner pocket. "He's to be trusted? Hold nothing back, hey?"

"He is my friend," said Antonio simply. "And now I shall go to inform Manuel of what is to be done. Then let us be off."

Ten minutes later the house was deserted, and they were all bound on their several missions. Let us follow Frank. To gain access to Rafaela proved ridiculously easy. The sergeant of the guard was acting as doorkeeper. Before he had an opportunity to speak, Frank put a gold piece in his hand. He did not recover for fifteen minutes. Ere that time had elapsed Frank had put Rafaela in possession of the main facts as affairs now stood. When at the end of his period of stupefaction, the sergeant hesitatingly approached them in the patio to inquire the nature of this millionaire's mission, Frank

authoritatively ordered him to prepare to accompany the Senora Hampton and himself to El Miraflores. And such magic can gold work that a short time later the sergeant was clattering in their wake, leaving three muddle-headed guardsmen behind, at whose mystification Tomaso was smiling discreetly.

The latter repaired at once to the kitchen.

"I think you will not have long to cook for these pigs of soldiers," he said to Juan.

"You have good news?" The old cook was disgusted with life these days.

"Yes. Manuel was at the back gate a half hour ago to borrow the vegetable cart. He says the day will soon come. And, Juan, what think you?"

"I? Since these pigs come, I no longer think; I despair."

Tomaso leaned close and whispered. "He says the Senor Hampton is a wizard, and these other two Americanos only less so. These machines on which the master worked these weeks past! He and his friends will work a magic with them to help the Cause."

Fat old Juan was impressed. Nevertheless, native shrewdness combined with an argumentative disposition to make him say: "But the Dictator has seized the machines."

"Ah!" Tomaso was triumphant. "That's what I said to Manuel, and he replied that perhaps they were bombs and would blow El Miraflores to bits."

"So." Juan reflected. "It would be a pity. I

once worked there, and the kitchens are so fine."

On the ride to El Miraflores the sergeant's prudence regaining the ascension, that worthy attempted on several occasions to interrogate the young Americano regarding the reasons for this journey; and to that end he would urge his horse forward. But, strangely enough, at such moments Frank's mount would become unruly and would dance about over the road to such an extent as to make it distinctly uncomfortable for the soldier, whose seat was none of the best. Then the sergeant would fall back, and would content himself with fingering the gold piece in his pocket until caution again urging him forward the scene would be repeated.

Under such circumstances, it might have been considered difficult for Frank and Rafaela to carry on any considerable conversation. Yet the contrary was the case; and, inasmuch as they could speak in English without fear of being understood by their escort, by the time they neared El Miraflores and turned into the long avenue which ran from the highway Rafaela knew all there was to know about the situation.

Indeed, she had been doing a bit of thinking on her own account. To her there loomed one difficulty to which she believed Frank had not given sufficient consideration. Suppose that when Frank obtained an interview with Jack in the Dictator's presence, her husband should not fully understand! Suppose he should believe that he was being urged to disclose

his radio secrets to the Dictator merely in order to make things easy for himself! Suppose he should not realize that Frank was actuated by a purpose which he could not disclose, but which spelled salvation for them all! It was possible that, in such case, Jack would refuse to comply.

As the little cavalcade approached El Miraflores along the avenue, therefore, Rafaela was silent, preoccupied with her thoughts. How, she was asking herself could this difficulty be overcome? Then in a group of figures lounging about a marble fountain before the Palace, she descried a familiar uniform, and her eye lighted with pleasure. Captain Miranda, she knew, was fond of both her and Jack. She must find a way to put that liking to good use. And as in a crisis the mind sometimes works with extraordinary rapidity, she had seen her way, her plan was made, by the time the gallant soldier approached as Frank was helping her to dismount.

First of all, she introduced the two men, and then hurried on breathlessly, cutting short one of the guardsman's compliments, as she saw his eyes stray to the sergeant sitting on his horse uncomfortably some paces to the rear. "Don't scold him, Captain," she begged. "You see, I was heart-broken at being separated from my husband, and the sergeant, being a worthy guardsman, couldn't resist my tears."

The captain cast her a keen glance, at the same time smiling slightly. Then he made a gesture, in-

dicating to the sergeant that he should canter off to his quarters. And the latter, seeing from his superior's manner that there was no future trouble to be feared as a result of his action, departed joyously, fingering his gold piece.

"But, Senora, I beg of you, do not try your tears on me," said Captain Miranda, low-voiced.

"Oh, I know it would do no good." There was a little quaver in Rafaela's voice.

"I do not say that, but—"

"But at least you could not be persuaded to let me see my husband? Is that what you mean?"

"Senora, I could not. Yet I will do for you what I can."

"Then will you take him a note?"

"That depends. There are many kinds of notes. Some say things which of course I could not transmit."

"Oh, but this one wouldn't be that kind."

While talking, they had proceeded indoors. Captain Miranda having commanded a groom to take the horses. They now entered a reception room, which was empty except save for themselves. Against a wall stood a small desk, with paper, pens and ink laid out. Rafaela seated herself and wrote rapidly. Then she blotted the missive and held it out.

"You can read it, Captain, and see whether it is something you may transmit."

"Oh, no," he said, gallantly. "How could you think it of me?"

Rafaela looked thoughtful. Then she folded the note, placed it in an envelope, and without any more being said, thrust this into a pocket of the captain's jacket. After a few more words, and promising to send a secretary to them to convey their wishes to Don Pedro he went out.

"What did you write?" asked Frank eagerly.

"Very little," said Rafaela. "Merely this: 'The value of friends can never be truly appreciated. Please do as Frank requests without question.' "

"Good," said Frank. "That will make it all right with Jack. And even if the Dictator read it himself, he wouldn't be any the wiser."

CHAPTER XXII.

UNDER DON PEDRO'S NOSE

WHEN a secretary at length appeared to conduct them before the Dictator, Frank was visibly a-tremble. Indeed, Rafaela, whose nerves were no less finely attuned but who exercised over them in such crises a mysterious control which for long had been a cause of admiration to her friends, gripped his hand by way of encouragement as they entered the private office.

But, although quivering as a thoroughbred race horse before the barrier lifts, Frank was not terrified. And, answering this swift pressure of the hand in kind, he became firm and resolute in bearing the moment his foot crossed the threshold of Don Pedro's sanctum.

It was to this room that Jack had made repeated visits during his stay in Valopia, and to his wife, therefore, it was familiar by description. Its spaciousness and the ornateness of its appointments, while noted, were not permitted to distract her attention from the squat and somewhat sinister figure which rose to greet them as they advanced. At the same time, Rafaela was careful to maintain that

look of anxiety which befitted the occasion and her role of worried wife.

Don Pedro's olive-tinted face, full-fleshed, with its heavy dark mustache and its crown of thick dark hair, made a disagreeable impression on Frank, who liked him even less than on his first visit. But this impression, of course, he was careful not to disclose. As for the Dictator, he was the soul of affability, bidding his guests be seated, and immediately ordering an attendant who was in the background to serve them with a delicious iced drink of fruit juices, after which the man was dismissed.

"And now," said he, leaning back comfortably in his chair, and looking at first one and then the other over the top of his glass, "to what do I owe the honor of this unexpected visit?"

It had been agreed beforehand that Frank should act as spokesman, and accordingly he launched at once into a repetition of that audacious speech which a few hours before he had conceived and had rehearsed to the incredulous ears of Antonio and Bob. Inasmuch as he now said the same thing again, only with more force and conviction, it is needless to repeat his words. Don Pedro heard him in silence, a silence broken only by an occasional long-drawn and seemingly half-suppressed sigh from Rafaela or a sob choked back before being allowed to burst from her lips. The sight of her face half-averted and of her downcast eyes trembling continually on the verge of tears

had a moving effect on the young fellow. He almost forgot that the courageous spirit behind this mask was scheming to create a certain impression on Don Pedro; and seeing, instead of the indomitable Rafaela, the timorous and fearful young wife she pretended to be, he presented his case with a conviction which otherwise might have been lacking.

That he was having a gratifying effect upon Don Pedro was apparent. The Dictator, as if considering it not worth while to hide his feelings from two such young inexperienced people as Rafaela and Frank, made little attempt to conceal his emotions. Thus, as Frank proceeded, Don Pedro showed increasingly the excitement to which he had fallen prey. And his exultation at discovering that Frank had the missing Synchronizer and would not only consent to relinquish it but also would attempt to persuade Jack Hampton to demonstrate his remarkable Radio-Vision invention, was so obvious as to be laughable.

As, however, to laugh would have been to spoil all, Frank on concluding preserved an air of anxious gravity, as if awaiting the Dictator's reply with the keenest anticipation. Such, really, was the case. And when Don Pedro forebore to keep him waiting long, or, indeed, to keep him waiting at all, but at once expressed his delight with what the young man had said and ended by despatching a messenger to summon Jack to his presence, Frank drew a heartfelt sigh of gratitude and of relief.

He knew in his soul that the most difficult part of his self-imposed task had been accomplished in persuading the Dictator to bring him face to face with his friend, and that now Jack, forewarned, through the medium of Rafaela's note delivered by Captain Miranda, would assuredly consent to the request that he set up his Radio-Vision broadcaster in Don Pedro's office.

There is no need to dwell on the scene which followed Jack's arrival, nor to rehearse in any detail what was proposed and agreed. The Dictator was completely gulled. Feeling in the first place the contempt of a crafty man for the youthful inexperience and simplicity of the young Americans, he was not looking for guile to be practised on him in turn. In all this no word had been mentioned of Germans seeking the secrets of Jack's invention, and Don Pedro was of the firm belief that he had wholly deceived his victims. He considered that they believed only what he wanted them to believe, and that was, that Jack's misfortunes were due to a suspicion that he planned to make use of his Radio invention in rebel behalf. In Frank's desire to exonerate his friend through persuading him to demonstrate the real nature of his Radio-Vision machine, Don Pedro saw nothing amiss. And, as such a demonstration was what he desired above all, in order that the Germans might obtain Jack's scientific secrets and he might obtain the huge bribe they were prepared to pay him, he was only too willing to let Frank exercise his eloquence.

As for Jack, he had read those fateful words which Rafaela had penned and which Captain Miranda had transmitted to him in his own strange way; and he knew that there was a plan afoot in his behalf, which he was expected to further. The exact nature of this plan he could not guess. But he felt that his wife and his friend would not betray him into giving away his laboriously discovered Radio secrets; and that anything they asked him to do was for a hidden reason, not apparent to the Dictator.

He consented, therefore, to begin at once to assemble his dismantled Radio apparatus for the purpose of demonstrating his Radio-Vision machine to the Dictator and of showing the latter that it was upon this invention, and this alone, that he had been employed. It was startling to him to hear Frank calmly declare that the Synchonizer—the key, the very heart, of his invention—would be turned over to the Dictator to be operated by Professor Bonatelli. Yet his confidence in Frank, and the almost imperceptible glance of encouragement emanating from the latter's eyes, prevented him from feeling any dismay. He was certain that Frank had no intention of permitting the Synchronizer or its secret to fall into hostile hands—and that without hearing one single word of detail regarding Frank's real plans. And, likewise without being told any word of comfort or hope, he was just as certain that behind all this was a well-conceived plan for his deliverance and for the

preservation of his Radio secrets from the plotters.

It was easy for Frank, by the use of a self-answered question or two regarding the time required to set up the broadcasting station of the Radio-Vision device, to let Jack know that it was not to be brought into play until several hours before midnight. It was just as easy for Jack to give assurance that he understood.

And, though all the conversation was conducted in Spanish, though the Dictator heard every word, yet it was apparent that he suspected nothing whatsoever of the fact that he was being deceived, or of the manner in which it was being done. In after days, indeed, the three young conspirators were to have many a laugh in recalling that interview. Yet it was touch and go while it lasted, and the strain upon them was great.

With everything at length arranged, Don Pedro's eyes gleamed with triumph. The Germans had confessed to him that they knew little, if anything, about Radio. They had told him that it was not sufficient for them to gain possession of Jack's Radio-Vision device, but that it must be demonstrated and its principles explained before they would cable Paris to place to his credit the huge sum of which he had so far received a mere advance. Well, they would now have their wish. When the demonstration was given, he would introduce them as his friends—one should stay by Jack at the broadcaster; the other should be with Bonatelli at Jack's town house to observe and note

the way in which the Synchronizer functioned. Then fortune would be his; a sum so huge that he could retire upon it in Europe, if ever driven into exile. Wrapped in these roseate dreams, Don Pedro missed a certain little by-play of glances between the two young Americans, and failed to overhear a word or two which Rafaela whispered to her husband that did more to put him in possession of the mystery than all that had been said before.

"If my suspicions of you prove unfounded, Senor Hampton," said Don Pedro, coming back to earth presently; "I shall be desolated, and I shall make any amends in my power for the inconvenience to which you have been put. Times of stress, however, demand stern measures, as I am certain you will agree. That must be my excuse. As for you, Senor Merrick, your interest in your friend's behalf does you honor. The more so," he added, "as I understand you two Americans are no more really than mere acquaintances." And at this he bent upon first one, then the other, a scrutinizing glance keener than any they had yet been subjected to.

Both sustained this glance, however, with tolerable firmness, and Frank even added in a voice of the utmost gravity: "Ah, Your Excellency, you see we are strangers in a strange land. And I am quite sure that what I am doing would meet with the full approval of my uncle—Senator Broadman." These last words he uttered slowly and significantly; and although Don Pedro made no reply, yet a

slight alteration in his countenance betrayed that the speech had not been without effect.

In fact, there was increased respect in the Dictator's attitude in dismissing Frank and Rafaela. He was not so incautious, however, as to permit them to quit his presence in company with Jack, who was requested to stay for a further discussion. They were asked to await instructions in an anteroom; and there Captain Miranda presently found them, conversing in low voices which were stilled abruptly at his approach.

The guardsman brought word which lifted the last weight from Frank's mind, for he said that Professor Bonatelli had been found too indisposed to journey to the city for the purpose of demonstrating the Synchronizer and that, on Jack's recommendation, this task was to fall to Frank. A company of the President's advisers would appear at the Hampton home that night to look on.

By an effort Frank controlled his elation, for he had feared that Professor Bonatelli would betray surprise at finding a substitute being palmed off for the Synchronizer and thus wreck all. Now that danger was removed. He managed however to cloak his gratification and to ask, with genuine sympathy, what was the cause of the old scientist's illness.

"He has eaten something which did not agree with him," said Captain Miranda. "And, then, too, doubtless, his mind has not been at rest."

He accompanied this remark with a significant

glance which Frank pretended not to see. He was not going to be tempted into entering a discussion now which might wreck all. Rafaela interrupted, laying a hand on the guardsman's arm and looking up at him with a grateful glance.

"Dear Captain Miranda, how can I ever thank you for—"

"I do not know what you are talking about, Senora," said the soldier precipitately. "Nor," he added in a lower tone, glancing about him, "do I wish to know."

Then in his customary voice he added: "It is long past noon, and you have a considerable ride ahead of you. May I get you something to eat?"

But Rafaela involuntarily shuddered. "No, thank you. Not in this place." She rose. "Come, Frank. Captain, will you have our horses brought up, please."

As the two rode down the avenue, escorted once more by the sergeant, Captain Miranda stood watching them until they disappeared from view, and an inscrutable smile played about his lips.

CHAPTER XXIII.

FINAL PREPARATIONS

RECEIVING Bob, introduced by Manuel, armed with Antonio's note of instructions regarding the calling of the Council and accompanied by the Synchronizer in the vegetable cart, Miguel entered at once into a furious activity. He read the note, grasped the young giant's hand in a grip almost, yet not quite, as stout as that which returned it—a circumstance which surprised him greatly, by the way, then turned to business.

"You need a room, Senor, in which to operate your invention?"

"Yes, a fairly large room."

"It is yours. Follow me."

He led the way by a side stairway, up which we have seen Antonio mount in the darkness, into that room where the conspirators had met.

"This is where the Council will assemble at 7 o'clock. The General has let you into our secrets, he says I may speak freely before you. That is a relief, Senor. With those fellows below I cannot always speak as I wish. They are my friends in the main, but strangers come and go, and these

strangers may be spies. So I have to be careful with whom I converse. Will this room do for your purpose, Senor?"

Bob looked around him with calculating eye.

"Very well, indeed. It is a good length. I shall set up the Synchronizer at that far end, between the windows which I see can be shuttered. And over the blank wall of this other end we can stretch a sheet which you will supply. It will be crude, but it will serve."

The radio enthusiast was to the fore in Bob at this moment. Regardless of the momentous issue hanging upon the approaching demonstration of Jack's invention, he was beginning to feel the thrill incident to taking part in a great event; nothing less than the first known trial of a revolutionary device never before existent in the history of the world.

History is not lacking in its great discoveries, great inventors. But this mountain of a youth discounted them all, in the depths of his loyalty, as he thought of his life-long friend. Jack Hampton was about to do what no man had ever done; he was about to make the vision of mankind limitless; to enable man to behold occurrences any number of miles distant from him, silmultaneously with their happening. Bob trembled with excitement at the thought. Then came recollection of the fact that base men planned to steal Jack's invention, to deprive him of the honors and rewards which should

be his lot; and he trembled a second time, but with another sort of emotion.

While these thoughts were passing through his mind, the two Valopians drew apart and held a whispered colloquy. Then Manuel excusing himself, took his departure. Bob scarcely heard him, so deeply was he sunk in thought. From these reveries he was roused by Miguel who said anxiously:

"I am told, Senor, that you have been ill of the fever. It is well, therefore, that you should rest before the excitement of tonight. It is now almost noon. If you wish, I shall myself bring you something to eat, and then I would advise that you retire to an adjoining room and take a siesta."

He would not listen to Bob's protests, but, whisking away with remarkable celerity for one of his size, in a short time returned, bearing a tray of tamales, tortillas and frijoles, and a pot of tea. For himself there was a bottle of wine, and, indeed, he would have pressed this upon his guest, having no high opinion of tea, except that Bob refused.

This strangely assorted pair ate for the most part in silence, each busy with his own thoughts. Then Miguel led Bob to an adjoining room which so resembled the cabin of a ship captain that there was no mistaking it for anything else than the old sea-dog's own chamber. It commanded a fair prospect of the roadstead, but of this Bob saw little, for, whether from suggestion or fatigue, he felt drowsy. Throwing himself on the bed, he exacted a promise that he

be waked at the end of two hours, in order that he might prepare the Synchronizer. With that he was left alone, and was soon asleep.

For Miguel, however, there was no siesta. Antonio's note had laid certain injunctions upon him, injunctions amplified by Manuel; and, his duties as host discharged, he at once set about fulfilling them. First of all, he held earnest conversation with certain men of rough appearance but intelligent glance, who emerged one by one from dark little wine rooms spreading out like vaults from the main room underground and who disappeared into Miguel's dim office behind the bar, only to reappear and mount to the street. Hardly had the last departed when the first returned, followed by the second, the third, the fourth, until all had been accounted for. These were Miguel's messengers who had carried word to the Patriot leaders of the call to a Council. Moreover, Miguel was making certain arrangements by messenger other than those for the Council. These activities, therefore, continued a long time, while upstairs Bob slept unconscious of it all.

Indeed, so occupied became the commander in control of all this coming and going that the hour at which he had intended to awaken his charge sped by unheeded. It was brought sharply to his recollection when suddenly voices were raised in altercation outside the room and the door was pushed open to admit a young man whose features were unknown

to him. With threatening glance, Miguel bounded to his feet, but the next moment the stranger was joined by Manuel, to whom still clung several attendants who had failed to bar his passage.

The glances of the two Valopians crossed. Words were unneccessary. Miguel by a movement of the head commanded the thwarted attendants to depart and close the door, and they unquestioningly complied.

"Well?"

Manuel advanced. "Senor, this is the other young Americano who is the General's friend."

"The one who went to El Miraflores today?"

Assured that this was so, Miguel warmly clasped Frank's extended hand.

"I have only a few minutes to spare," said Frank quickly when he had been placed on an accepted footing. "I want to see my friend, and then I must hurry to return to our house."

Miguel started. "Your friend? Of course. He is asleep. Come."

At the bedroom door they paused while an involuntary cry of admiration burst from Miguel's throat. Bob lay outstretched on the bed, legs extending beyond its confines, arms as strong as beams flung wide, while a gentle sound as of distant and continuous thunder in the hills came from his partly-opened lips.

"He is a giant," said Miguel, advancing. "The strongest and biggest man in Valopia."

There was even a little envy in his tone, for in this country of slightly-built men who when they reached middle age became like puff balls, the old sea-dog was himself like another Hercules. But that slight trace of envy melted away beneath the bright sun of admiration for the sleeper's mighty thews.

"He certainly looks healthy enough," murmured Frank, who now stood beside the bed and could note the warm flush of his friend's cheeks. "Guess he must be getting better."

The rumbling stopped on a sour note, the sleeper's lips closed and his eyes opened. Then he bounded so rapidly to his feet that Miguel fell back a step in alarm, while Frank, too late to avoid it, was folded in a mighty embrace, and the two youths fell together on the bed. Then shouts of joyous combat arose while Miguel, stupefied, unable to understand, stood by with mouth agape. The struggle was short and was terminated when, in one mighty upheaval, the two interlocked forms fell to the floor with a thud that shook the building.

As they scrambled to their feet, laughing and yet calling each other harsh names in the midst of this laughter, Miguel's startled gaze burst on them.

"He thinks we're crazy." And Frank with aching sides fell back again on the bed.

But Bob gripping him by the belt heaved him to his feet.

"I don't blame him. It's all right, Senor Miguel, this is merely the manner in which we are accus-

tomed to greet each other. Now," with a shake that threatened to rattle Frank's teeth out of his jaws, "subside, fellow. I want to know how you made out."

Frank sobered. "Yes, and I want to get back to Jack's house and set the stage."

"Set the stage?"

"For the Committee of Investigation which Don Pedro will send tonight to watch my demonstration of the Synchronizer-what-ain't. Bonatelli is sick, and it will be up to me to make the pretended demonstration. I saw Jack, and he understands. Don Pedro was completely taken in. And—"

He launched into a description of his visit to El Miraflores, to which Bob and Miguel listened with the closest attention. Cries of satisfaction burst from them at the conclusion.

"To think that you are little more than mere boys," said Miguel. "What must the men of your country be like!"

Frank ignored the compliment.

"So the minute we got back to town, I took that two-way set over to Jack's house, where the sergeant who had received his injunctions from Captain Miranda mounted guard over it. Then I made an excuse to go home again, and asked Manuel to guide me here. Wanted to tell you what had happened, old thing, because I thought you'd sort of like to know. Besides, I thought I might help you with the Synchronizer."

"How much time can you spare?"

"Not much. I want to get back and rig up a masquerade dress for tonight."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I'll make that two-way set at least look like a Synchronizer. There are some old packing cases and hardware, hinges, and so on, in Jack's workshop. With some black cloth, and old lens and a little fast-drying paint I can make quite a presentable machine." Frank grinned.

Miguel's glance was puzzled hopelessly, but Bob burst into understanding laughter. Then he sobered.

"When Don Pedro's men find out that you have fooled them, they're liable to arrest you and—"

"And what? Throw me into jail? Well, what if they do? I'd merely go to join Jack. And I guess I could stand it for twenty-four hours."

"That's right. That's all it would be."

"Certainly. Tomorrow night Antonio will have us out."

"But what if his plans miscarry?"

"Oh, well, you'll still be at liberty." And all mixed up with the twinkle in his eyes was such a gleam of confidence that the big fellow blushed. He jumped precipitately to the floor.

"Well, come on, let's have a look at the Synchronizer. I'll show you where I'm going to put it up."

He led the way into the Council room, which was filled with light dropped into the sea by the westering sun and reflected back into the eastern

windows. A brief explanation clarified Bob's plans. Frank approved. But then one question led to another, and in a trice the pair were deep in a discussion of the Radio-Vision device which their comrade, Jack Hampton, had invented, and which was to be demonstrated so soon. Miguel who could not comprehend anything of what was being said, shrugged his shoulders and left the room. They were scarcely aware of his departure.

Be it remembered that only a few years before they had been as ardent as Jack in conducting radio experiments. From the very beginning of radio in America, following the end of the Great War, in which they had been too young to participate, and the return to America of men who had experienced its benefits in battle, they had been devoted to applying and developing the principles of vocal and oral communication without the use of wires. Financed by wealthy and indulgent parents, they had even erected their own station on the Hampton estate, near Southampton, Long Island, where they had conducted experiments in long distance radio communication on low wave lengths, under special government permit, before the growth of public broadcasting. During school and college years, they had been as interested as Jack in experimental work. And it was due more to the facts of their parentage than to anything else that Jack, son of an engineer of international fame, had gone in for radio engineering as a profession, on graduation from Yale,

while they, born to the inheritance of a prosperous export house, had entered the world of business.

It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that at this moment they should forget the political issues of Valopia which trembled in the balance, forget even their comrade's peril, and think only of the tremendous scientific issue involved. Would Jack's invention work? Would it be able to broadcast sight, at the same time synchronizing sound? In brief, would Bob, here in Miguel's upstairs room, when the time came, be able to see the actions of those in Don Pedro's private cabinet at El Miraflores, and to hear every word that was said?

They interrupted each other, words flew thick as hailstones in a storm; and Manuel, opening the door of the stairway and peering in, repeatedly, went unnoticed.

The method by which Jack hoped to achieve his results was rehearsed step by step in this swift debate. There was, first of all, the special screening camera, resembling an ordinary motion picture camera, but breaking down each picture taken into dots and lines. Then there was the photo-electric cell for the purpose of transforming these dots and lines received as light waves into sound waves, which would be transmitted by the sending apparatus. These were the parts of his invention which Jack would shortly bring into play at El Miraflores. In some form or other, all were already in use. But the real key to the whole invention lay in the mech-

anism which the two youths were examinging as they talked. Here also were devices already in use, either in the motion picture industry, or in the transmission of pictures by telegraph, such as the synchronizing apparatus for directing the ray of a projection lamp over the screen in zigzag fashion, from top left to bottom right, thus reproducing dot for dot and line for line the dots and lines broadcasted by Jack. But it was in the electro-photographic apparatus for transforming the sound waves received into light waves, that the heart of the invention resided, and this was something never before developed.

"That battery will give you enough juice, all right," Frank said. "I asked Jack about that, to make sure."

"Oh, yes." Bob patted the sides of the case indicated, which had fitted snugly, along with the other apparatus, into the larger case designed by Jack to contain the whole. "Old Jack knew there was no power to be obtained in this pokey country, and took steps accordingly. Look here; the bulb of his projection lamp is no bigger than an automobile headlight bulb, so that the battery supplies plenty of juice. And then, see this lens for magnifying that light? Oh, he took care to be independent of everything. Why, you could operate this in a desert."

"He's a genius; no less." Frank stared with a species of awe at the apparatus before him.

Bob agreed by a nod of the head. Their voices dropped. Silence settled down on the Council room, and in this silence—the first in many minutes—the stair door was heard to creak. They faced about and Manuel, seeing that he could at last gain attention, came forward.

This respectful form was like the voice of conscience. Frank started, gazed about the room in which dusk was deepening, cast a quick glance out of the eastern windows, which told him that the ocean was turning gray in the twilight, then seized Bob by the shoulders.

"Yes, yes, Manuel, I'm coming right away. Go down. I'll join you at once."

As the steps of the faithful Valopian could be heard retreating, Frank gazed up at his big comrade.

"I've stayed too long. Well—wish I could be with you tonight."

That was all, but Bob understood.

"And I wish I could be with you," he said simply. "You've got the toughest job of all. I'm afraid you're going to get into trouble when Don Pedro's gang finds out you've fooled them. Probably those German chaps will be there, and—"

Frank laughed to dissemble a tremor or two which he could not avoid.

"They'll come disguised, I imagine. Don Pedro, of course, doesn't want us to realize that they are at the bottom of the matter. Probably one will stay

at El Miraflores to watch Jack, and one will come to town to watch me—. Well, I don't imagine they know much about radio; they're business agents sent out to steal Jack's invention. All they want is to satisfy themselves that it works, and that they've got the right thing. But as I say, Don Pedro wants us to believe Jack is in trouble merely because he was suspected of rebel communications, and not because Mr. Dictator is being paid to pull the enemy's chestnuts out of the fire. So they'll come disguised and I won't have to appear to know them. As for trouble to me—"

Bob shook his comrade affectionately.

"No fighting, remember. If they want to arrest you, let them."

"Oh, I'll not fight. I leave that to you."

"And if you get arrested, look for me at El Miraflores tomorrow night."

"When Antonio and Jose storm the palace?"

"Yes. Thanks to that nap, I feel fit for anything."

The big fellow seemed to swell visibly as his muscles stiffened.

"Old fire eater!" Frank laughed, a bit tremulously, and tore himself free from Bob's grasp.

Don't worry, and don't let Jack worry. Tony and I will get you out."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE CONSPIRATOR UNVEILED

SEATED by a table on which stood a shaded kerosene lamp in that room like the cabin of a ship, where earlier he had slept, Bob put aside his book and came to attention at the general scraping of chairs and the rising murmur of voices in the Council Chamber beyond. He sat listening a moment, then, turning out the light, tiptoed carefully to the door, and, opening it a bit, put eye to the crack and peered out.

Antonio had returned from San Andres on the eve of seven. He had had time for only a word with Bob. Beyond telling him that his mission had been successful, he had been unable to enter into any explanations. Then Bob and his radio apparatus had been thrust into Miguel's bedroom, and the door closed upon them, as the approach of the first of the Patriot leaders was signalled from below.

"You understand, of course," Antonio had said, "that neither you nor your device must be seen. Someone among these men who are coming is a traitor who will go direct from this meeting to Don Pedro. It would spoil all our plans for you to be seen."

At Antonio's invitation to do so, Bob had sat with ear to the keyhole at first. But the proceedings had bored him, and then he had lighted his lamp and tried to read. Now they were departing, and he experienced a sense of relief. One by one, at carefully spaced intervals, the cloaked figures took their departure. At length, only Antonio and Miguel were left. A low whistle floated up the stairs, and at this signal from a sentry below that the door had been locked behind the last to depart, Antonio strode swiftly across the floor toward the door of Bob's room.

Bob stepped out to meet him.

"Ready for me?"

"To arrange your device? Yes, Senor."

"Good. Lend me a hand, Tony."

Together they carried into the Council room the various parts of the Synchronizer, which Bob already had unpacked from their snug compartments in the case. Miguel looked on.

"Don't forget the sheet," said Bob over a shoulder; and Miguel, with an exclamation, hastened away.

While they worked, Bob asked questions. Presently Miguel, his task of stretching a sheet over the farther end of the room completed, joined them.

"So you told your friends you were going to seize the Presidential Palace tomorrow night?"

"At the head of Miguel's waterfront workers; yes, Senor."

"And they believed you?"

"I am quite certain they did. Not so, Miguel?"

The old sea-dog's deep voice rumbled from its barrel like chest. "They howled like dogs. Every one said it should not be done yet, that we were not ready. One would think that to make a revolution there must be only talk, not action. Talk, talk, talk, it is all they are good for. Bah, what rabbits!"

"And you are sure that one at least is a traitor who will carry the word directly to Don Pedro?"

Miguel spoke quickly. "It is that Francisco."

But Antonio shook his head. "I don't know. But we shall soon see."

At that Miguel's fingers made a burring sound in his thick hair. "You think this thing will show us, hey?" He pointed at the Synhronizer, taking shape under Bob's assembling fingers. "My General, you know about these things, while I—well, I am only an ignorant man. I find it hard to believe. Here it is, in this inn of mine. There is no connection with El Miraflores. How, then, can we expect it to show us what will presently occur there?"

Bob laughed confidently. "Don't you worry, Miguel. Just steady this chair while I push up that trap door in the roof and climb out to string this aerial to those poles you showed me this afternoon."

But Miguel pushed him aside. "No, no. The roof is steep, and you have been ill. I am used to climbing aloft."

Taking the coils of wire, which he had restrained

Bob from stringing by daylight lest the sight arouse unwelcome attention, he disappeared through the trap door, and the sound of his body sliding along the rooftree could be heard. Bob put his head through the opening, and called low-voiced directions. The lead was attached, and brought in through the trap. The ground wire was run out of a window giving into the back court. These activities engaged the attention of all three for several minutes. When at length they were re-assembled, Miguel resumed his doubtings where he had been interrupted.

"But if your device should fail, what then?"

Antonio answered. "We would just have to assume that the traitor had carried word of tomorrow night's proposed attack on the palace to Don Pedro."

"Ah, but suppose Francisco—"

"It may not be he," objected Antonio.

"Suppose the black-hearted scoundrel has seen through us, my General, and that when he goes to Don Pedro tonight he tells him the attack on the palace in the plaza will be only a feint, and that the real attack will be on El Miraflores?"

"I do not believe any one suspected."

Miguel was obstinate. "Nevertheless, such a disaster might occur. And if this device does not show us all that goes on in Don Pedro's cabinet presently and let us hear all that is said, you will be likely to walk into a trap tomorrow night."

Bob interrupted. "But the device will work, Miguel. No need to worry." He turned to Antonio. "Tell me how you made out at San Andres. You found the mysterious Jose?"

Antonio was so long in replying that his companions turned inquiring glances on him.

He was seated at a table, watching Bob at work. He put his elbows on his knees and dropped his head into the cup of his hands. His eyes stared moodily at the floor.

"Senor, yes; I found him. He will assist me tomorrow night, he and his band. We will face Don Pedro together. It will be for the Dictator like seeing the dead rise accusing from the grave." His voice trembled with emotion as raising his head he looked straight at Miguel and said: "Old friend, the mystery is mystery no longer. The mysterious avenger of San Andres—this man who was known publicly only as a poor old peasant—but who in the depths of the forest has all these years been quietly assembling a band of mistreated Valopians who have reason to hate the Dictator—this man, I say, is the father I believed was dead."

Bob was quiet out of respect, but Miguel was speechless from necessity. He struggled to reply, but could only gasp. Then he recovered his voice, and flinging himself on the seated figure grasped him by the shoulders.

"What's that you say? Don Jose de Tovar alive? At the head of a band of armed men? Now may my

patron saint be praised! Oh, I shall burn candles for this! But, tell me, my General, there is no mistake?"

"Mistake?" Antonio's head lifted proudly.

"Oh, no, I see there can be none. But how—but what—but—but—"

And Miguel, unable to phrase the questions that clamored to be asked, spluttered to a full stop.

"It's a long story," said Antonio. "He believed me an exile out of all touch with Valopia. After recovering his mind, which wandered a long time, due to the shock he had received, he stayed afar in the forest, never venturing into the city. And I—as you know, I believed him dead. I was sworn to vengeance; and now such vengeance as I shall have! Ah, Don Pedro, Don Pedro, you little know!" The fiery Iberian blood of this man of iron, who usually held himself under the severest discipline, momentarily gained the ascendency, and, leaping to his feet, he strode up and down with disordered step, his eyes seeming to dart flames; while the old sea-dog, Miguel, bowed his head and his lips moved in silent prayer at the same time that he made the holy sign on his breast.

Suddenly Bob, who had been silent out of respect mingled with stupefaction, darted to the central table and blew out the kerosene lamp, plunging the room into darkness. The next moment there was a little click in the Synchronizer, and then a powerful ray of light emanating from it, pierced the darkness and,

falling upon the white sheet which Miguel had drawn across the far wall, painted on it a picture which caused Miguel to cease his prayers and Antonio his pacing.

"The Dictator," breathed Miguel. "See how he sits at his desk. Now he lifts his head. He gazes toward the door. Some one is entering. Why—" His voice broke abruptly. "It is not Francisco, it—"

"It is Feldman," said Antonio.

There was another click.

"Silence," hissed Bob. "They are about to speak."

The scene was not long in being played out, yet a world of villainy was revealed in those flying minutes. The uncanniness of beholding the drama, waveringly, yet recognizably, portrayed on the make-shift screen, and of hearing the voices of the characters at the same time, gave Bob an eerie feeling. He did not note how his companions stood together, grippped in an intensity of anger; he even heard the voices floating from the loud speaker only as in a dream. The thing that had possession of him above all else was a feeling of tremendous and whole-hearted elation at the success of his friend's invention.

As in a dream he heard the voices of those two precious scoundrels—Don Pedro and Feldman—utter farewells; saw Feldman depart; saw Captain Miranda enter the Cabinet; heard the giving of orders for a disposition of troops on the morrow night to guard the Presidential Palace in the city from attack. Still the scene continued to unfold,

without Bob paying it much attention. It was not this which of itself held him engrossed, but rather the thought of Jack's achievement.

Then Jack himself entered the picture, summoned by Captain Miranda, and at the Dictator's words a great light dawned on Bob. What the Dictator said was simply this: "Senor Hampton, I am about to summon my counselors, so that they may look on while you demonstrate your invention." To this Jack bowed, and then, turning aside so that his face shown full on the screen, he smiled with such a look of triumph that Bob, reading it aright, burst into a shout of delighted applause. "Good boy, Jack."

"Yes, Senor, it is a marvellous invention," agreed Antonio politely.

"It is, but I didn't mean that."

"What then?"

"Why," said Bob, "the Dictator wasn't aware of the fact that Jack's invention was putting him and Feldman on record. All this time that he and Feldman have been talking, Jack was running the machine unknown to him. How Jack did it, I don't know. But he certainly put one over on Don Pedro."

CHAPTER XXV.

AND THEN THERE WAS ONE

For a long time after the lights had been switched off in the Dictator's cabinet and the demonstration of the Radio-Vision device had come to an end, Antonio and Miguel were engrossed in talking over what they had seen and heard and in discussing plans for the morrow. Although a party to this conference, Bob was inattentive. He was thinking at first of Jack's triumph, and then as the minutes flew by he began to worry about Frank.

He was impatient to be gone. He and Antonio intended to return to the old Pedrarias mansion. If Frank had escaped arrest after the certain failure of his pseudo-Synchronizer to operate in the planned demonstration at the Hampton home, he would be waiting for them. If not, Manuel would be there. And Bob was anxious to learn what had occurred.

The conference at last drew to a close and Antonio rose to go. Bob got eagerly to his feet. But at that moment there sounded from outside on the street a shrill peculiar whistle, which caused Antonio to start and frown.

"It is Manuel," he said; and without more words darted down the stairs.

Bob was at his heels with Miguel behind when An-

tonio opened the door to admit Manuel. Sufficient light penetrated the dark stairwell falling through the open door of the lighted room above to disclose the man's spent condition. That he had been running was apparent, and, although he had somewhat recovered his breath, he leaned against the wall as if too tired to go a step farther.

Thrusting aside Antonio, Bob seized the servant by an arm and bent close.

"Frank? My friend? Has anything happened to him?" he demanded.

"Senor, yes. Tomaso told me. He has been arrested, and they are taking him to El Miraflores."

Manuel stopped to draw breath, and Bob sank down on the stairway with a groan.

"But, Senor, that is not all."

"Not all? You don't mean Mrs. Hampton—"

"Oh, no, Senor. They have not disturbed her. But Tomaso warned me. They were coming to our house to also arrest you."

Bob whistled. Then he stood up, placing a hand on Antonio's arm. Well, Tony, it's a good thing we weren't there. I hate to run, and I might have stayed to fight. Then we'd all have been in Don Pedro's hands—a real family party." His voice grew grim. "I suppose there's nothing to do until tomorrow night, Tony. Well, I'll wait that long. But just bear this in mind. When you and your father beard Don Pedro, you won't be alone. There'll be three of us."

CHAPTER XXVI.

TO HIM WHO WAITS

LYING in the dark woods behind El Miraflores the following night, Bob had the first opportunity in many hours to piece his kaleidoscopic impressions together and, as he mentally phrased it, "see where he stood." Out of the night came the occasional stir and rustle caused by cramped men changing position on the ground, and the thin whisper of voices now and then reached his ears. These sounds emanated from Jose's numerous band, but the men themselves could not be seen, for the woods were dense, and as it lacked two hours of moonrise, the darkness was so impenetrable that even Antonio was merely a thickening of the shadow, though he lay but a hand's breadth away.

From the hour of Manuel's announcement that Frank had been carried off to El Miraflores and that orders for his own detention had been given, Bob's activities had been indeed strenuous. Had it not been for the splendid recuperative powers of his magnificent body and for loyalty to friends in need, which drove him relentlessly on, he might have succumbed, for the effects of his recent illness had not

entirely disappeared. But he was like a man of iron. He had snatched a few hours of sleep while Antonio and Miguel made final preparations, and then had ridden over the mountains with the former to San Andres. Arriving before dawn, there had been a council with Jose, and then there had followed hours of such feverish comings and goings, while the band gathered, that a man would have to be inanimate clay to sleep. Then had succeeded the march by trails deep in the forested mountains, where horses could not be employed and one went afoot perforce, to this spot within striking distance of El Miraflores.

Bob rubbed his hand along the stock of the rifle supplied him by Miguel before leaving the waterfront inn, as if to assure himself by the physical contact with wood and iron that all this was not a dream. Here with the others he had thrown himself down to rest, after concluding that fatiguing march from San Andres. Surely, he thought, the half hour alloted them must soon be up; and as if in answer a hand fell on his arm and Antonio whispered that the time had come to strike.

By what miracle Jose's men were enabled to make their way out of the woods with so little noise, Bob never knew; nor did he know how he himself came to be in a narrow road running between dense masses of trees which loomed blackly, in two far lines, against the moonless sky. Yet there he was at length, with cleared ground under foot, and march-

ing forward with strides so long that Antonio on his right and Jose still farther beyond had difficulty in keeping pace. For hours he had been tormented with worries as to the fate of Jack and Frank, and, to a less degree, it must be confessed, of Rafaela. But now as the night air cooled his brow while the vigorous motion set his blood to pulsing warmly, these anxieties fell away like a heavy cloak dropped in the road. A sense of immeasurable freedom filled him, as he looked at the tropic stars, the black walls of trees, the dim faces of his two companions and the ghostly line of men merging into the darkness behind.

This was life, he told himself, life; and just as worries regarding his comrades had fallen away, so now all doubt as to the successful outcome of his adventure vanished, too. The dull thud of marching feet seized his imagination. These were not mere bandits, not even rebels, but men who had fled from slavery to the freedom of the wilderness and who now were coming back to dare the oppressor in behalf of their families, their relatives, of men and women and children unknown to them and unrelated, of a whole nation. Tramp-tramp-tramp! It was the muffled drum beats of Nemesis.

The darkness drew together into a deeper shadow and the night gave up a man who whispered to Jose, then sped away. The column halted. Another shadow appeared and disappeared, and another. Jose's scouts, men accustomed to make their

way, silent and unseen, like ghosts, were reporting.

Whispered orders were passed. The marching force halted abruptly at a dense evergreen hedge, higher than a man's head. Bob crawled through an opening at Antonio's heels. They were in a well-ordered park of trees and shrubs, where the darkness was only normal. On the left lay the gray smudge of a gravelled drive, but it was not toward the drive they were heading, Bob saw as, following Antonio, he looked back and found Jose's men streaming through the hedge and clinging to his heels.

They were marching up the lawn, now they were running, and now they burst through the screen of trees into the wide and splendid avenue encircling the palace. Jose's scouts, those men accustomed to tread jungle tracks so silently that even the wild beasts were not disturbed, had done their grewsome work well. Not a sentry of all who had been scattered through the grounds was left to give the alarm.

For a moment Bob paused in amazement beyond the power of speech, and all up and down the edge of the trees the others did likewise, halting abruptly as if the wide avenue were a sea into which they feared to plunge. What held Bob, what held the others, however, was nothing of menace but instead a strange sight to greet men bent on a wild undertaking. El Miraflores was a blaze of light, and the heart of this brilliance was the wing opposite

them, which housed the great ballroom. The windows were open, across these panels of light whirled couples in a dance, and the strains of a seductive waltz trembled languorously on the soft air.

A ball was in progress; if these wild scarecrows who gazed through eyes of hate gleaming in dark faces but knew, a ball to celebrate in advance the capture of the rebel leaders whom Don Pedro was confident of ensnaring at that very hour in the halls of the Presidential Palace in the city. Had not the rebel plans been betrayed to him? Had he not despatched Captain Miranda before dawn that very day to enter the Presidential Palace under cover of darkness and lay an ambuscade for the rebels? In a short time, no, at this very hour, the rebels would be pouring into the Presidential Palace, secure in the belief that Don Pedro's guardsmen were at El Miraflores. They would scatter to the looting. And then Miranda and his Praetorians would fall upon them and capture them, leaders and all. The rebellion which had been writhing beneath the surface, and which he had found such difficulty in scotching, despite the betrayal of some of its secrets by Feldman, would be drowned in a bath of its own blood.

Thus reasoned Don Pedro; and some such thoughts as these were going through his mind as the dance came to an end and the sycophants of his court crowded about him in the center of the floor. There was only one fly in the amber of his hap-

piness, and it wriggled a bit as his gaze fell on the two Germans on the edge of the throng. Just as his hand had been about to close on the fortune they extended, it had slipped from his grasp with the discovery that the American inventor's young friend had failed to produce that portion of the Radio-Vision device which the Germans deemed vital. Ah, well, undoubtedly the third Americano, the one who had disappeared, had the Synchronizer. He would soon be found; the Dictator's police were scouring the city now. And, even if he were not found, why, the two Americanos who were imprisoned must know his whereabouts; and there were ways of making them—

Thus far roved the Dictator's thoughts when there came an abrupt interruption. A woman screamed at a long window, a man cursed in fright, and simultaneously there leaped into the room a horde of savage men in rags who, however, carried most uncommonly good rifles. Every window belched more and still more of these uncouth fantastic demons of the night, and while some took their stand at the doorways to bar all retreat, the others flung a huge circle about the floor which swept the dancers into a panic-stricken mass in the center.

It was all done so quickly that it seemed an effect of magic; and there may have been some in that be-laced and be-uniformed throng who thought for one fleeting moment that this was but a novel masquerade prepared by Don Pedro for his guests.

If so, they were soon undeceived, for now three men stepped to the fore. One was a blonde giant who overtopped his companions head and shoulders, and toward whom the women stared with admiration even in their fright. But it was the old tatterdemalion on his right whose deep voice, trembling with mingled emotions of rage and vengeance, broke the strained silence which had succeeded the first blind stampede.

"Pedro, you are called to answer for your sins. Stand forth."

A brave or a reckless man might have defied this old bandit to come and take him, but Don Pedro was at heart a coward and a mortal fear was on him. The crowd parted as, with dragging step and hands working convulsively, he moved forward to face this ragbag who gave commands to him who was above commands. A species of awe and stupefaction mingled fell on the throng.

"Who—who are you?" gasped Don Pedro, halting some ten paces away. And then with one last feeble spark of tyranny: "This is treason. You shall pay dearly for this."

The other drew himself erect, and there seemed to descend on him a mantle of dignity that hid his tatters.

"You have made your last threat, Pedro. You ask who I am, but you know. Look closely, then ask your own heart. I am Jose de Tovar."

Don Pedro's face blanched, his throat worked con-

vulsively and his lips parted, but no words came from them, while from all the brilliantly dressed throng rose a murmur of astonished cries. Out of this sudden tumult emerged three words that struck on the ears of the blond giant at Jose's heels with a stunning impact that for a moment dulled comprehension.

Those words were, "The old President," repeated over and over again.

In a daze Bob looked at Antonio, but the latter's eyes were fixed on his father. Bob touched his arm.

"Do they mean your father? Was he the old President?"

Antonio nodded. "The best Valopia ever had. He was living in retirement, but Don Pedro feared him because he was venerated by the common people."

Then his gaze returned to his father's face.

Bob, however, was given something else to think about, for at this moment his glance fell on the figures of two men quietly working their way toward the great doorway of the hall, as if meditating escape in the general excitement. In one bound he had reached them, and his hands fell on their shoulders and spun them around.

"Ah," he cried, "my two little shipmates, Hans and Fritz."

With commendable promptitude, the Germans struck together, one kicking at Bob's shins and the other launching a blow which glanced off his

shoulder. At this the big fellow let out a roar, whether of anger or delight it would be difficult to say. It may be that the capture of El Miraflores had been too tame for him, and that he welcomed the opportunity to fight. At any rate, he ducked swiftly under the flailing arms of the German who was seeking to strike him and, seizing him about the waist, lifted him clear of the floor. The German was a big man but in Bob's arms he was helpless, a struggling, writhing, cursing figure, impotent to do harm. His companion's face went white, and he started to run. Perhaps he could have burst through the cordon at the doorway, for Jose's men were watching their leader, but he did not get the chance to try. Bob swung the man in his arms, then released him. The poor fellow hurtled through the air, landed on his companion's shoulders, and they both fell crashing to the floor.

There was no fight left in the Germans when Bob picked them up and handed one over to the safekeeping of several of Jose's men who came running forward. The other he gripped by the collar and propelled him toward the doorway.

"Lead me straight to Jack Hampton," he said fiercely, "or—"

And, leaving the threat unfinished, captor and captive vanished from the hall.

CHAPTER XXVII.

L'ENVOI

It is time now to draw this history to a close, and, to begin with, there is Captain Miranda. It was not until hours after the seizure of El Miraflores that word of that event reached him at the Presidential Palace in the city. Dawn found the news known everywhere and everywhere hysterically acclaimed. The populace rose en masse, and Miguel placing himself at its head, surrounded by a body guard of his waterfront adherents, sent a flag of truce to Miranda summoning him to surrender and pleading the folly of useless resistance.

Captain Miranda, who saw this as well as his opponent, nevertheless made use of the strength of his position to demand the best of terms for his men. When these were accepted, he turned the command over to a subordinate and himself disappeared, for he knew that, justly or unjustly, he would be held to blame for many of the Dictator's crimes. He appeared later in Cuba, and there was some talk recently of his being involved in one of the numerous South American imbroglios.

Jack could never join in condemnation of the

guardsman, for, besides remembering certain favors at a crucial time, he knew that the other had acted merely according to his lights. As for Rafaela, she knew what she knew, and that was, that the gallant captain had been touched a little by her charms—just enough to make him willing to help her and Jack without his really being aware himself of the reason for his graciousness; so she, too, remembered him with gratitude.

Don Pedro, stripped of honors and power, was held to trial before the Supreme Court of Valopia—a reconstituted court—and paid the penalty of his many crimes. The fortune which he had wrung from the country and cached abroad were largely recovered and placed in the national treasury to be devoted to education and public improvements.

For a time after the *coup* which had unseated Don Pedro, Jose de Tovar ruled as Dictator, but only until the state of affairs in the country could become settled. Then a general election was called, at which he refused to stand as candidate. His son Antonio—in reality, Enriquez—was overwhelmingly elected, and with him a Chamber of Representatives comprising young men of his own liberal views, among whom was Francisco de la Cruz. Between him and the new President, only the warmest of friendships existed and the suspicions sown by Feldman in the young Representative's mind had, of course, been entirely removed. As to Feldman, incidentally, his end remained in doubt, although

it is quite likely that Miguel could have told if he had wanted to talk. Miguel, under the new Presidency, became Minister of Marine, and promptly set about the building of a navy. Indeed, he insisted that Jack equip the two vessels which constituted the foundation of this branch of the national service with his Radio-Vision device, and was greatly disappointed when informed that this could not be done until patents had been obtained and the invention safely placed in the hands of Jack's American employers.

Jack and his wife were the first to sail for New York, as he was anxious to be relieved of his trust as soon as possible and to get his invention on the market. Jack bore with him the brilliant medal of the ancient Valopian Academy of Science and Arts, which was publicly pinned on his breast by old Jose de Tovar at a session of the Academy summoned for that particular purpose. The Academy had suffered bad days under Pedro the Dictator, but was now restored to all its old brilliance, and Jack valued this decoration highly. Even dearer to him, however, was the engraved scroll containing the thanks of the nation for the service he had rendered in unseating the Dictator and restoring the Republic through means of his invention.

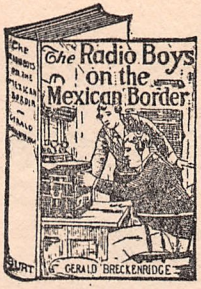
His chief regret was at leaving Frank and Bob behind him, for these two old comrades had decided to continue their stay. They had had a long talk with Antonio, whom they could not learn to call by

any other name, and their eyes had been opened as to the business possibilities in Valopia now that the incubus of Don Pedro was lifted from trade.

"Tell Dad that we're liable to open a Valopian branch in spite of ourselves," said Bob, as Jack boarded the steamer.

"And if we're stuck down here for long," appealed Frank, "why, please, oh, please, Mister Inventor, fix up your Radio-Vision apparatus in the old shack at Southampton and send us the Synchronizer, so that we can get together now and then."

THE END



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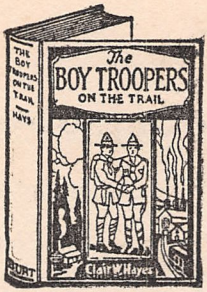

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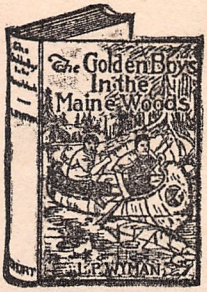

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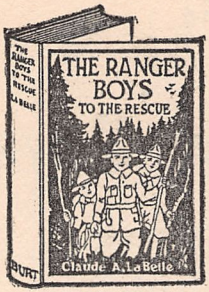

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